

Unsung

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Summary: Not everyone wants to be a hero. Some just want to come back alive, even if that means doing something horrible for survival. Note: This is the first time I have published anything so advice would be appreciated. (Rated M for violence, language, sexual violence)

1. The golden rule

Warning adult content read at your own discretion

It was a cold and windy day yet sweat rolled down the face of the radio operator in heavy sheets.

"This is outpost bravo two six!" he said into the radio's hand set panic in his voice. "We are under heavy covenant assault! We need reinforcements now!"

"Roger that bravo two six," the voice on the other end said "the birds are in the air now their e.t.a. is-" He never heard because a needle round caught him in the back of his head just under his helmet.

"Oh fu-" the round exploded showering the rest of the marines behind the sandbags with a mist of his blood and brains. His body now with a large hole for the back of his head slumped to the ground. A marine wiped his eyes, his hands smeared with his comrade's blood.

"Come on you fucking cowards fire back!" he ordered. The remaining three raised themselves and fired their assault rifles at the squad of Grunts. The Grunts were knocked off their feet and joined the rest of maybe 50 or so. A group of five Jackals advanced towards the marines over lapping their shields. "Hold your fire." The sergeant ordered. He pulled two grenades off his belt, holding one in each hand he put his thumbs in each pin and pulled them out at the same time. He then threw them at the Jackals starting with the one in his right hand then the one in his left hand. They landed in front of the

Jackal's formation. They only had time to stare at them before they went off sending what was left of the bastards backwards ten feet.

"INCOMING 12 O'CLOCK HIGH!" one of the three marines shouted pointing at the sky. A banshee screamed towards the sandbags. The sergeant jumped to the side just as the glowing blob of green light hit the sandbags square on sending a mixture of dirt, sand, and bloody limbs into the air. The sergeant felt a rough claw close around his throat. He was jerked to his feet and then his boots left the ground as he came eye to eye with a blue clad Elite.

"Oh you want some too huh?" the sergeant wheezed. He jerked his pistol from his holster and opened fire point blank. The Elite's shield flared but held, he only laughed and squeezed tighter. The pistol slipped out of the marine's hand. The Elite then pulled him closer so he could whisper in his ear.

"Your death will be in vain." He said in passable English. He then tossed the dead marine aside and marched deeper into the outpost. Inside the barracks two marines made a last stand behind a makeshift barricade of mattresses.

"Franklin keep fire on those fuckers!" Lieutenant Jenkins ordered.

"Yes ma'am," Franklin Grunted through gritted teeth as he fired the light machine gun at the steady stream of Grunts and Jackals that flowed in through the door. If we could just keep them coming in single file then we might have a chance was Jenkins reasoning. That's when the machine gun stopped firing.

"Franklin?" Jenkins demanded.

"Got a jam it's a cooked off round ,," Franklin said as he lifted the hatch and went to remove the round when a plasma bolt hit him in the face.

"Damn it!" Jenkins swore as she ducked behind the mattresses. She ejected the empty magazine in her assault rifle, slammed a new one in place and hit the bolt release. She then sprinted towards the back of the barracks when a plasma bolt clipped her right leg causing her to fall. She rolled over to face her attackers when one Grunt ripped her rifle away from her. Another one yanked her pistol from its holster. Soon more waddled over and held her arms and legs down. They then began to rip at her uniform removing chunks of it. She managed to free her right arm and punch a Grunt but two more jumped on her arm and firmly held it down. Soon she wore nothing but her under garments, her boots and her helmet.

"What's all this then?" a booming voice demanded in perfect English. A gold clad Elite strolled into the barracks. The tugging stopped but Jenkins remained pinned. He walked over to them and looked the human over. "You all know the rules." He barked. Jenkins had never been so happy to see an Elite in her life. "Leaders have the first go." Jenkins was still trying to figure out what he meant when he knelt over her. He placed a finger on her stomach and traced it all the way down to her underwear. "Such soft skin," he remarked "I will enjoy this." He gripped her underwear and gently slid it down to her knees.

"What are you doing?" Jenkins asked wide eyed. His mandibles twisted into a smile as she felt something enter her. It was rough and seemed to be ringed like the rings around an old wooden barrel. The Elite started to thrust going deeper and deeper with each one. Jenkins felt like she was being sawed in half. She bit her lower lip to keep from screaming. The Elite's thrusting quickened.

"You are very warm," he remarked as he reached out his hands and placed them on her shoulders. Then using that as leverage thrusted even deeper. Her pelvic area began to heat up from the friction. The Elite suddenly withdrew himself. "Turn her over." He commanded. The Grunts placed her on her stomach and held her in place. She felt the Elite's rough hands grip her hips then the tip of his member rest lightly on her anus. He thrusted without warning going as deep as he could. Jenkins screamed as she felt something tear this only seemed to encharge him as the sped up. Jenkins began to screw rather loudly now.

"Please," she pleaded "Please just stop." The Elite showed no concern in fact he went even faster. Just when Jenkins couldn't take it anymore the Elite stopped and let out a roar. She felt something warm flow into her. He withdrew himself again and stood. "Do with her as you wish," he said as he walked out.

Only two miles out from the outpost help was coming in the form of three Pelican drop ships. The three Pelicans approached outpost B26 at full speed hoping to get there before everyone was lost.

"Outpost bravo two six this is voodoo two one do you read?" the pilot asked over the radio.

"Ah fuck it's a real mess down there." the co-pilot said. "There is a clearing by the barracks set it down there." The pilot brought his craft around a covenant drop ship coming into view as he dead so. He reflexively pulled the trigger on Pelican's yoke. A red light started to blink and beep informing him he had no ammo.

"Damn it!" he cursed under his breath. The covenant's assault on the outpost had come at the worst possible time. Most of the Pelicans were out on another mission when the assault happened. The rest were down for repairs and refit so the covenant had caught them truly flat footed. When the request for help came screaming over all the emergency channels the tech crews scrambled to get three of the remaining five ships air worthy again. In order to save time they were not armed only fueled, put back together and stuffed with anyone the base could spare. The covenant ship didn't have that problem however and sent plasma bolts towards the approaching Pelican.

"Hang on!" the pilot shouted over the radio to his passengers in the back. The pilot sharply zig zaged his craft to avoid being hit.

"Paint him!" the co-pilot ordered referring to the slang term for targeting a craft with homing missiles.

"What?" the pilot demanded "we don't have any missiles!"

"They don't know that," the co-pilot explained "maybe we can scare the bastard." The pilot now understood as he flipped on the targeting

system and watched as a diamond searched and found the drop ship then turned red. There was a loud beep emitted from the system to alert the pilot he had a lock. There is also a different tone for if a enemy has a lock on him and the co-pilot was risking that the covenant drop ship had the same kind of thing and that right now it was telling him that the humans had a lock on him. The drop ship suddenly flew away from the pelican at a high rate for speed sending a few parting shots as it did.

"Well shit it worked." the pilot remarked shocked "Alright back there 20 seconds to dirt." In the troop compartment of the Pelican were five marines and two sniper teams. Two of those marines were Pvt Mendez and PFC Jones who we both unlucky enough to be sitting on the two end seats. The drop ship hovered a foot off the ground and the five marines disembarked taking care not to land on any bodies. Freed for the marines the pilot took off again not wanting to get hit by stray fire. The five formed a wedge formation and moved in on the barracks figuring if there were survivors that where they would be. Just before they could reach it however they ran into another covenant drop ship this one had landed on the ground. Jones quickly lead the formation behind a sandbag wall that had once served as a machinegun nest.

"What the hell are we waiting for? We have to get in there." a marine asked Jones.

"We don't have anything that can take that thing out so we have to wait till it leaves." Jones explained not taking his eyes off the drop ship.

"What makes you think it's going to leave." the marine demanded.

"Because it landed. It wouldn't do that unless it was dropping off or picking something up." Mendez explained for Jones.

"Or someone." Jones said pointing at a gold armored Elite as he walked out of the barracks and boarded the drop ship. The drop ship immediately rose into the air and flew off. Mendez keyed his radio.

"Voodoo two one we have a drop ship leaving our AO with a HVT on board." Mendez said in to his helmet mike "how copy?"

"Good copy," the pilot's voice came over the radio "what are you recommending? Over."

"Recommend you track the target and find out where it goes. Over." Mendez explained.

"Roger on who's authority? Over." pilot demanded.

"No ones. Over." Mendez closed his eyes and waited for the pilots answer.

"Very well I'll see how far we can go. Out." the pilot finely said after a minute pause. Mendez nodded at Jones who then lead the marines out and over to the barracks door. The marines lined up along the wall on the right side of the door awaiting Jones single. Jones shot his head in and back out again just enough to get a quick

look.

"Seven tangos all Grunts," he whispered "they seemed to be forced on something on the floor and are all group together. Go in quietly and wait till we are all in position before engaging. Signal when ready." The marine at the back of the line placed his rifle on the marine's right shoulder in front of him and placed his left arm on the marine's back. The farthest back marine then used his left hand to tap the marines right shoulder who in turn did the same to the marine in front of him in till it got to Jones. When he felt the tap he rushed in the chain unbroken in till the last marine entered the barracks. The line broke and the marines fanned out and took cover with the group of Grunts in their sights. Jones who stood behind a makeshift barricade made out of mattress that a light machine gun was resting on gave the order.

"Fire!" he shouted as he did so himself.

The Grunts started to rip at Jenkins body again and was to stunted she just let it happen this time. She waited to die and wanted nothing more unaware that the five marines had entered the barracks. Gun shots echoed through the barracks and Jenkins felt warm blue blood slash over her. The five marines walked over to her and stared at her not sure what to do.

"Jesus," Jones gasped.

"Were they eating her?" Mendez asked.

"I don't know but she's dead either way." a marine said. Jones looked at his eye piece and saw the friend or foe in her helmet was still working.

"She is first Lieutenant Jenkins of the USMC so show some respect." Jones said as he looked around for a blanket to cover her almost naked body. Jenkins got to her feet a little shaky due to the wounded leg. All the marines gasped and stared at Jenkins.

"Something wrong?" she demanded looking each one in the eye. They all dropped their gaze to the floor.

"No ma'am!" They shouted in unison.

"So did anyone manage to kill a gold armored Elite?" she asked. The five marines looked at each other finely one spoke.

"No ma'am," he said a light sweat started to form on his skin "he got away in a drop ship before we touched down."

"Then I have a little mission planed for tonight." She said as she limped towards the showers.

"What kind of mission?" Jones asked.

"The kind that won't be going on any record."

6 hours later under the cover of darkness the Pelican descended on the valley. The six marines in back were busy applying face camouflage. Now in a fresh uniform and her leg patched up with biofoam Jenkins sat in the seat closest to the opening tapping her

foot impatiently.

"This is where we traced the enemy drop ship to," the pilot said over the marines helmet speakers. The pilot put the ship down on a hill overlooking the valley and the 6 marines ran out. "Remind me again who ordered this op?" the pilot asked.

"ONI," was all Jenkins said in a very smooth voice. The pilot flew off into the night satisfied. "Ok you know the drill." The marines laid down in the grass. Jenkins took out her field glasses and looked the enemy camp over. She keyed her throat mike.

"Report Raptor," She said.

"This is raptor one," one of the two concealed sniper teams radioed back. "We have two portals circling around the camp. A mixed bag of Grunts and Jackals inside the camp."

"Raptor two here we can take out the picket portals without alerting the camp." The other snipers chimed in.

"Understood and the package?"

"It's in the dome building in the middle of the camp." Raptor one said.

"All right we are moving into position." Jenkins said starting to crawl forward through the grass. It took the marines 15 minutes to reach the camp crawling on their stomachs. They stopped 10 yards from the camp's fence. "All right hit them Raptor," Jenkins whispered into her mike.

"Raptor one here eagle on two tangos," the sniper said over the radio "clean shots, I'm taking them."

"This is Raptor two eagle on three, no wait, four tangos. Clean shots, engaging." The other sniper answered in kind.

"Raptor one all clear on my end," he radioed after several seconds of silence.

"Confirmed Raptor one. Uh yeahâ€¦Raptor two agrees we can't take out anymore without giving ourselves away. Outer portals are taken care of." The second team reported.

"Understood we'll take the rest out ourselves," Jenkins said "spot and assist." She waved towards the fence and the marines stood up and quickly crossed the open ground and climbed it. They then spread out taking cover where ever available. Jones hid behind a pile of their purple crates; when a voice spoke into his ear.

"Jones," Raptor two said "you have two Grunts advancing on your position."

"Recommended course of action?" Jones whispered into his mike.

"No tangos have them in sightâ€¦ if you can, take them out quietly." The sniper suggested.

"Understood," Jones slugged his rifle and pulled out his silenced

pistol. "What side?"

"Hang on," raptor two said as he observed the Grunts. "Shit, one is going left; the other right."

"Understood let me know when they are both three feet from me," Jones ordered pulling out a second pistol also silenced and holding it in his left hand. Jones pressed his back against the crates the pistols held at his ears. He exhaled slowly.

"Now!" Raptor two almost shouted. Jones took a step forward spinning 180 degrees at the same time so that he faced the Grunts. He held the pistols in front of him and fired the one in his right hand killing the first Grunt. He then looked down the one in his left hand and fired killing the other one. The body of the first Grunt hitting the ground only a split second before the others. He holstered both pistols grabbed each Grunt by the arm and pulled them behind the crates. "Clean kills Jones," Raptor two reported. Jones moved to the next piece of cover.

On the other side of the camp Private Mendez crouched behind a prefab building. His mind was racing. He was thinking how this mission wasn't approved by anyone so if the shit hit the fan they would be on their own. He then thought how good it felt to be on the attack for once and stalking the covenant instead of them stalking him. Two Jackals walked past the building their shields not activated yet. A smile touched Mendez's lips. He pulled out his combat knife and moved out from behind the building. He took two silent, quick steps to get behind the first Jackal. In one move he warped his left arm around the Jackal's neck, pulled it back so the Jackal was bent over backwards and locked his elbow so he couldn't breathe. Then using his right hand he stabbed him three times in the chest, purple blood splashed out with each stab. The other Jackal continued to walk forward unaware of his comrade's death. Mendez let the body drop, he then ran for five steps before sliding feet first into the Jackal's legs knocking him over. Mendez held the Jackal's beak close and plunged his knife into its heart. He grabbed each Jackal by the beak and dragged them behind the building he hid behind. He wiped his knife on his pants before putting it away.

"Looks like you got the rest of the portals," Raptor one said over all their radios. "Looks like the only ones left out in the open are the ones by the fire." Three marines closed in on the camp fire hiding behind an inactive wraith. They peeked over. A group of five Grunts and four Jackals sat backs out around the camp fire. The three nodded at each other and added silencers to their assault rifles. They jumped out and poured fire on to them, they were killed before they could even stand.

"Clear," one of them radioed. Still on the other side of the camp Mendez entered the building he was hiding behind. Inside five Elites slept. The guards were the Jackals that he had killed just moments before. Mendez pulled out his knife again and slit each one of their throats, it was easy work for they had no armor on. He smiled as purple blood began to pool at his boots.

"Barracks clean," he radioed with satisfaction. He then ran out and behind a different building.

Raptor one watched him through his scope. Movement caught his eye and

he moved his rifle to get a better look. An Elite walked out of the building Mendez was behind. He walked towards the opposite end and was about to move behind blocking his shot.

"Fuck," he said keying his mike "Mendez you have a tango heading right for you."

"Say again," Mendez asked when he smacked into the Elite and fell backwards. He quickly got to his feet. The Elite pulled something off his belt and an energy sword came to life. "Shit, shit, shit." Mendez said snapping his pistol up aiming for the Elite's head. The Elite's shields flared as he advanced on Mendez, who in response backpedaled still firing. The Elite lunged forward meaning to stab Mendez. Mendez's pistol slide locked back as the last round in the magazine exited the chamber. The Elite crumbled to the ground just in front of Mendez, the sword just missing Mendez's left foot. His hands shook as he reloaded the pistol after coming so close to death. "That has got to suck." He said speaking to the dead Elite.

"All units move towards the command building," Jenkins ordered. The marines encircled the dome building. Guarding the door were two black clad Elites.

"Hang on we got this," Raptor two radioed. "Ready Raptor one?"

"Ready."

"I have the left one. On my mark threeâ€|twoâ€|oneâ€|mark." The two Elites' heads suddenly blossomed blood and they slumped to the ground. The marines lined up on the right side of the door. Jones ran up and stuck a fiber optic probe under the door. An image played on his left eye piece.

"Clear," he said over his shoulder. He went to the key pad and attached the hack tool. He then entered the command and the device went to work at overriding the lock. The door slid open after a minute and the marines walked in. They passed a empty radio room and a briefing room. A Grunt was hard at work cleaning the floor when Mendez shot him, his pistol making a snap because of the silencer, splattering the floor with his blood. The marines reached a door and Jones stuck the probe under it as well.

"Well?" Jenkins demanded.

"The package is there," Jones reported "and someone else too."

"Who is it?" Jenkins asked "I mean are they a combatant?"

"No," Jones said studying the image "It looks female, maybe his wife." Jones shrugged.

"What the hell is his wife doing in a combat zone?" Mendez asked. Jones gave him a look that clearly said: he didn't have a clue and why would you think I would.

"Really," Jenkins said "All right new plan, I want both of them alive, right side door breach." Four marines lined themselves along the right side. Jones stood on the left side. He opened the door and threw a flash bang inside the gold clad Elite's private quarters. It

went off emitting a blinding light. The marines rushed in, the first two tackling the gold Elite. The third one went to help the first two get flex cuffs on him the fourth one in was Mendez and he pointed his rifle at the female Elite. She ran forward and Mendez smacked her in the face with the butt of his rifle knocking her to the floor. He aimed his rifle at her head.

"Don't even try it bitch!" he shouted. Jones moved in next and also aimed at the female Elite. With the gold Elite's hands now bound the three marines helped him to his feet but held him by his shoulders.

"We are clear!" Jones shouted not taking his eyes off the female Elite, finger on the trigger of his rifle. Jenkins walked in and the gold Elite's face twisted into a mixture of surprise and anger.

"You!" he shouted.

"Yeah I was in the neighborhood and thought I would stop in." Jenkins said "You know, to pay you a visit like you did me."

"My guards will kill you!" he said angrily.

"You'll find that you two are the only ones left alive," Jenkins explained walking closer to the gold Elite.

"What do you want?" he sneered. Leaning forward slightly the three marines pulled him back.

"Just to show you the same hospitality that you showed me." Jenkins said stopping just in front of him. She leaned in closer so their faces were just inches away. "You know just being neighborly."

"You wouldn't dare." The Elite almost whispered.

"Oh, I would," Jenkins turned towards Jones and Mendez "All right which one of you is it?" Jones and Mendez shot each other a glance rifles still aimed at the female Elite.

"Ma'am?" Mendez asked.

"One of you have your way with her I don't care which," Jenkins explained. The two looked at each other again even more confused.

"Uhâ€|what do you mean Lieutenant?" Jones asked.

"Take advantage of her." Jenkins said pointing at the female Elite. The two exchanged glances again. "Do I have to spell it out for you: one of you have sex with her." Mendez and Jones looked at each other then at Jenkins and finally at the female Elite. "Fine if you won't choose then I will: Jones you're up."

"You want me to rape her?" Jones asked disbelieving.

"That is exactly what I want you to do." Jenkins said. "Or so help me I will shoot you where you stand." Jones looked the Elite over. It had been a full three years since he started his third tour. It was the mostly womanly thing he had seen in a long time besides Jenkins,

but she scared the shit out of him. Ashamed by it, he felt himself stiffen. Jenkins pulled out her pistol and aimed it at Jones's head.

"Alright," Jones said quickly. He slowly walked over to her taking all the time he could. He then stood over her and looked her over one more time. She was taller than any woman he had seen but everything seemed to be in the right place. Jones slowly reached out his hand to touch her lower under garment when she gripped his wrist with her claw.

"None of that sweetheart," Jenkins said "If she does that again shoot her Mendez." Mendez nodded but he seemed ill at ease with this. The female Elite slowly let go of Jones hand.

"Ma'am please," Jones pleaded. Jenkins pulled the hammer back on her pistol it was still aimed at Jones's head. Jones grabbed her under garment and gently removed it. The gold clad Elite jerked forwards but the three marines held him in place. It looks the same as a human's Jones thought or at least close enough. Jones stood over her and then slowly knelt. He looked over at Jenkins again his eyes begging her not to make him go through with it. She motioned with her pistol. Jones looked back at the female Elite. He unzipped his pants and pulled his member out. He was ashamed at how stiff it was given the current situation. He sighed wishing to be anywhere else then as he slipped inside her. He gasped under his breath; he never felt anything like it. It was so soft, and it was so wet it was like he was using lube.

"There done." Jones said looking a Jenkins with pleading in his eyes.

"Nope," Jenkins said crossing her arms still holding the pistol "you have to at least finish. Don't think you can fake it either I'll know." Determined to get it over with now Jones grabbed her hips and started thrusting at a steady and shallow pace. Jones tried to think of something else, anything else. When she suddenly grabbed both his wrists. Mendez snapped his bolt back and let it slam forward to get his point across. She then moved his hands to her shoulders and leaned in closer.

"Deeper," she whispered. Jones was dumbfounded but compiled thrusting fully at the same pace. He tried not to admit it to himself but it felt amazing. "Faster!" she suddenly shouted. Everyone wore a look of shock on their face.

"Some wife you got there." Jenkins remarked to the golden Elite.

"You whore!" the golden Elite shouted jerking forward again. Jones listened again and sped up his thrusting. Jones started to feel a warming sensation that combined with the softness made it all the more pleasurable. With her commands Jones didn't feel ashamed anymore and began to enjoy it.

"Harder!" The female Elite demanded. Jones could hardly believe it but did as instructed. She then did something, squeezed something and made herself feel tighter.

"Ah god," Jones said unable to control himself.

"You like that don't you?" she demanded.

"Yes." Jones admitted turning slightly red ashamed once again.

"Look at me." She coaxed. Jones looked up and looked her in the eye. She was calm and if Jones didn't know better enjoying it. She suddenly let out a faint roar. Holy shit I think she just came Jones thought to himself. With that in the back of his mind he felt himself on the verge. A few seconds later he let himself go sighing as he did. Jones waited in till he had softened before he pulled out and zipped up his pants. He then stood next to Mendez staring at the floor feeling nothing but embarrassment.

"We're done here," Jenkins announced suddenly. "Let's get to the bird. Grab the gold bastard and let's go." The three marines led the gold Elite out the door followed closely by Jenkins. Mendez patted Jones on the shoulder in attempt to comfort him before leaving. Jones started to leave and stopped just in front of the door. He looked back at the female Elite and felt an overwhelming sense of shame over take him. He turned on his heel and hurried out. The group waited at the LZ for the Pelican. It showed up two minutes later already caring both sniper teams.

"So how did it go?" one of them asked as they boarded.

"It was easy as fuck," one marine said forcing the gold clad Elite to sit. The other two smiled at the others inside joke as they took their seats. Mendez looked at Jones who was still staring at the floor. Mendez put a hand on his friend's back trying in vain to reassure him. The pelican took off and flew into the night.

"What's with him?" a sniper asked pointing at Jones.

"Nothing," the marine sitting next to the Elite answered "He just got screwed over on this mission that's all." The other marines snickered. The sniper looked confused but didn't press. A single tear started to form in Jones's right eye, he blinked at it was gone.

"It's alright," Mendez told him but not believing it himself.

"No its not," Jones said still not looking up "and it never will be." The rest of the ride to the outpost was in silence. The pelican set down on pad two. The Elite was taken to a holding cell until ONI could get there. The marines went about their duties and life went on.

2. A desperate plan

Private Mendez lay on his stomach on the hard packed ground and peered into the tree line the two moons giving very little light for the marine to use. It had been only four days since the Covenant attack on the outpost. The Covenant had launched a few half ass assaults on the outpost before then but it was clear that the marines had shrugged off the main assault. That always made him wonder why they just didn't steam roll them. They seemed to be toying with us was Mendez thoughts. Still on fire guard Mendez thought of that mission where they captured that gold bastard. He remembered how the

mission had them all AWOL but when they returned with the gold elite ONI happily over looked the fact that they never approved such a mission. They were called heroes and medals were awarded. One was given to his best friend Private First class Jones. Lieutenant Jenkins was all too pleased with herself willingly explaining the mission again and again to anyone who asked. She always said that Jones was the real hero and she couldn't have completed the mission without him. This always caused Jones to become overwhelm with shame and Jenkins knew this. Mendez felt nothing but pity for Jones for he had only been watching and felt ashamed so he could only image what Jones felt. Mendez felt a tap on his shoulder he looked up to see a marine standing over him.

"I'm your relief," He said as he laid down next to Mendez. Mendez stood up his fire guard over and walked back to the barracks, he stored his gear in his foot locker and walked to the side of the bunk bed when a soft grunt caused him to stop. Mendez eyed the marine sleeping on the bottom bunk. Jones was tossing and turning with his body soaked in sweat. It was clear he was having a bad nightmare as he did ever night since that mission. Mendez knew not to wake him up however for if he did Jones wouldn't fall back to sleep and he had only gotten a few hours of sleep. Mendez climbed to the top bunk and wondered what Jones dreamed of every night.

Jones's nightmare was always the same and it replayed itself every time he closed his eyes even when he didn't sleep. Jones was in the middle of a fire fight as he always was. Jones fired into oncoming waves of Grunts and Jackals, just when he thought he was going to be overran the attack suddenly stopped. Jones stood and turned expecting to see the other marines he had heard but not seen. Instead he found only Lieutenant Jenkins standing with her pistol at her side. An Elite stepped out of nowhere as he always did and started walking towards Jenkins. Jones shouldered his assault rifle and pulled the trigger but it jammed, it always jammed. Jones yanked on the bolt but it was stuck forward and wouldn't budge. Meanwhile the Elite was still getting closer to Jenkins who only continued to stare at Jones. Jones opened his mouth to warn her but no sound came out. Jones threw his rifle to the ground and jerked out his pistol but the slide was locked back. Jones ejected the magazine and shoved a new one into the pistol's grip and pushed the slide release but the slide stayed locked back. It always stayed locked back. Jones ejected that magazine to and put in another one. The slide still stayed locked back. The Elite now stood directly behind Jenkins who still would not turn. The Elite raised a plasma pistol and held it to Jenkins' head. If Jenkins was aware of this she gave no sign of it she only stared at Jones, who could only stare in disbelief. Jones slapped the side of his pistol trying in vain to get the slide to snap forward. Jenkins still stood completely still as if she was standing at attention in front of an officer. Jones gave a yell as he used his left hand to punch the pistol. The slide suddenly snapped forward. Jones raised his pistol aiming for the Elite's head, but Jenkins was quicker. Jenkins bullet went clean through Jones's right shoulder knocking him to the ground and causing him to drop his pistol. Jones gripped his shoulder with his left hand blood spilling between his fingers.

"What the fuck?!" Jones grunted. He tried to move his right arm but it lay limp at his side. A shadow fell over him and he looked up to see the Elite standing over him clutching an energy sword. Jones brought his left arm in front of his face in an attempt to shield

himself. The Elite simply kicked his arm to the side and then used one of his feet to pin it to the ground above his head. He then raised the blade looking at Jones's pinned arm, roaring as he brought it down. Jones closed his eyes his face scrunched waiting for the sharp and searing pain but it never came. Jones opened his eyes and looked at his left arm which lay between the energy swords two forks. Jones could also see that if he moved it in any direction even a little bit it would be sliced off. The Elite then knelt next to Jones and warped one of his claws around his chin and turned his face to the left and then the right.

"You'll do," He said as she let go of his chin. He stood and walked over to where Jenkins still stood.

"What the hell are you doing?" Jones demanded trying not to sound scared. The Elite's head whipped around.

"You will hold your tongue or lose it human." He spat. The Elite raised his pistol again leveling it at Jenkins' head once again. This time he discharged the pistol the green bolt going though her head completely. Jenkins fell to the ground the empty holes where her eyes should be looked directly at Jones. The Elite returned and knelt next to Jones and freed his energy sword.

"You're done," He pleaded "So please let me go." His head tilted slightly to one side as he looked him in the eyes.

"This is," The Elite paused for effect as he raised the energy sword above his head "Where the real fun begins human!"

Jones's eyes flew open and he was staring at the bottom of Mendez's bunk. Jones slowly got up his body sticky with sweat. Jones then ran his hand down his face removing the sweat from his forehead. Jones stood and walked towards the shower hoping that would help take the edge off the nightmare. Mendez watched Jones through a half open eye as he lay on his bunk. Mendez thought about getting down to talk to him, knew it wouldn't do any good and went to sleep.

At 0600 Mendez was awaken by his internal clock from all the mouths in basic and years on deployment. Mendez swung his legs over the bunk and dropped to the floor his right knee buckling slightly. Mendez raised to his full high and looked at Jones bunk. Jones lay on his bunk dressed in uniform, hands at his sides, eyes open and staring at the bottom of Mendez's bunk. Something told Mendez that Jones had been like that since he woke up almost three hours ago.

"Come on," Mendez said place a hand on Jones's shoulder who looked up at Mendez through tired and fearful eyes. "Let's get some chow."

"You should get dressed." Jones said in an attempt to make a joke but his voice was empty and weak.

"Yeah," Mendez said removing his hand "I think I should." Mendez turned on his heel and started to walk towards the showers. Just before Mendez got there he shot a glance back at Jones who had gone back to staring at the bottom of Mendez's bunk. Mendez shook his head as he walked in to the showers which we just plastic tubes inside of cubicles that were smaller than most bathroom stalls. Mendez striped off his underwear and shirt, walked into a cubicle and turn the

valve. The almost, but not quite, freezing cold water started to drip on his head. The stream couldn't have been bigger than two inches wide. Mendez quickly rubbed soap on his body and quickly washed it off again turning the water off when he was done his shower only lasting about a minute and a half. He would have been down quicker but the water pressure was pitiful. Mendez dried himself off and changed into his uniform and went back to Jones who hadn't moved a muscle since Mendez left him. Jones turned to look at him.

"Ready now?" Jones asked some of his old self returning to his voice.

"Yeah lets go," Mendez said jerking a thumb towards the mess hall. Jones stood and they started to walk. They left the barracks and walked towards the mess hall Mendez used a hand to block out the sun. Despite it being early the sun was already burning bright on this cursed planet. Mendez stepped in front of Jones and grabbed a metal plate that had high sides so they could be used as bowls or plates. The two marines walked up to the counter and each got a helping of soldier's stew which was a mixture of whatever they had left for food chopped up and boiled in water. Mendez took a seat at an empty table Jones sat across from him. Mendez shoved spoonfuls of the goop into his mouth. Jones stirred his a bit then took a few small bites not feeling much like eating. Mendez saw this and put his spoon down.

"You will eat that or I will shove it down your throat," Mendez threatened. Jones looked into Mendez eyes saw he wasn't joking and started to take full sized bites. Mendez shook his head slightly he knew Jones wasn't sleeping well and he didn't want him starving himself as will.

"Just once I would like something that hasn't been turned into paste. Like a piece of bread," Jones remarked as he shoved the last bit down his throat. Mendez leaned in closer.

"You want to talk about it?" Mendez whispered. Jones looked at Mendez a fire lit behind his eyes.

"No I don't," Jones said clearly as he sat straighter. "And I never will."

"You need to," Mendez said speaking a little louder. "I know what it's like to-

"You know what it's like?" Jones said speaking in a harsh whisper. "You know what it's like to be given an order to do something that you know is wrong? Then when you refuse so your life is threatened? Then despite how wrong it is you enjoy it and you have to live with yourself after words?"

"Whoa, hang on a second," Mendez said putting his hands up. "I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say I know what it's like to know something and not want to talk about it. I was then going to say, no matter how bad this may sound, talking about it really does help a little."

"Oh," Jones said dropping his gaze the fire dying. "Sorry."

"Don't worry about it." Mendez said with a wave of his hand. "I know

you must be going through a lot and it must be har-

"INCOMING!" A marine suddenly shouted. No sooner had the words left the marine's mouth then Jones and Mendez were already in the air diving under the table. Just as they landed they was a dull thud and the ground shook beneath their stomachs. A few seconds later another thud and the ground shook again.

"How many are there?" Mendez asked Jones as they lay on the stomach under the table praying they wouldn't hit the mess hall even though it was one of the bigger buildings. Jones sat and counted the thuds and the time between them.

"Two wraiths." Jones declared.

"That means about 50 to 75 Grunts, 30 Jackals 10 Elites and a Hunter par," Mendez explained.

"Retaliation will get most of them," Jones said his face grim.

"Why the hell are they just toying with us?" Mendez asked his friend. "I'm sure they could just wipe us out so why don't they?"

"I don't know," Jones said a little irritated by the question it wasn't the first time Mendez brought it up. "Maybe they are too busy with something else and are only launch these half ass assaults to keep us from going on the offensive."

"But we have ships in orbit this time they can't just get away." Mendez countered.

"Look I don't really fucking know ok," Jones said with a sigh. "But let's face it their ships could easily make it past our blockade."

Across from the mess hall four pilots caring their helmets ran to the two waiting Pelicans sitting on their pads. They jumped in, two for each one, and strapped on their helmets.

"Come on lets going before we get nailed!" One of them said as the canapÃ©s closed and the engines roared to life.

"This is Viper we are spinning up," The Pilot in the other Pelican said over the radio to all hands. He then pushed the throttle forward and the engine gave a throaty roar as it flew up and away from the camp along with the falling plasma. The other Pelican took off right behind him settling in at the other Pelican's left and just a little behind him.

"I'll take lead on this one Viper two," The Pilot in the one that took off first said.

"Roger that Viper lead," Viper two said. The area around the marine base had been turned into a moonscape and it was very easy to locate the two wraiths and the advancing Covenant forces.

"This is Viper to ground forces," Viper lead said over the radio "Enemy assault force in grid bravo four."

"I've got tone," Viper two reported as two red diamonds appeared over

the two wraiths.

"All right let's get those fucking wraiths in one pass," Viper lead said "Guns, guns, guns." The two Pelicans opened up with their chain guns and sent a volley of rockets at the Covenant forces. The two wraiths were destroyed first followed by the Grunts and Jackals that were torn apart by the guns and final more were sent into the air by the exploding rockets. A second later the two Pelicans passed over head made lazy turns and fired again from the other direction. Depleting their rockets as they did so.

"This is Viper," Viper lead radioed to all ground forces. "We are leaving your AO to rearm ETA 20 minutes hold fast boys." The two Pelicans turned again and flew towards the nearest outpost to rearm leaving the marines without any air support. No sooner had the plasma stop falling marines were already jumping into the mortar pits, sighted grid bravo four and sent the first shells down range. It had only been a total of 20 seconds from the end of the Pelicans' gun runs till the first shells landed and exploded in the middle of the still scattered Covenant assault force.

Back in the barracks Jones and Mendez hurried to strap on their body armor and ammo vests along with the other off duty marines. Mendez grabbed his assault rifle ran out of the barracks just behind Jones. The two marines ran to the firing line in front of grid bravo four. The two ducked behind a chest high wall of sandbags with about 30 other marines. Mendez peeked his head up to get a look at the advancing forces. The nearest enemy, the Hunter pair, was still 250 meters out and the mortars were really hammering them as Elites tried to order their troops. The Hunter pair raised their weapons and sent a pair of glowing green blobs at the sand bags. Because of their distance most of the marines had a chance to move out of the way except for an unlucky PFC who watched in horror as one of the blobs hit his left side. He then began to scream as the plasma started to burn through him. He screamed in till someone shot him in the head.

"Do the same before me," The Marine said returning his fire to the Covenant. A marine rose above the sandbags, shouldered a rocket launcher and fired both tubes. The first rocket hit the Hunter on the right in the chest blowing him to pieces. The other Hunter charged lowering his left shoulder as he did so, the second rocket flew just past his head. The marines poured fire onto him but the rounds just bounced off his armor. The Hunter was gaining speed aiming right for the sandbags hoping to scatter the marines. A mortar shell landed right in front of the charging Hunter however and the explosion knocked him on his ass. The marine with the launcher had reloaded and fired at the Hunter again. The rocket hit him square in the chest as he tried to stand keeping him on the ground. Now free to fire the marines hosed the advancing forces with assault weapon fire and rockets. The Covenant returned fire in kind but their plasma blots were slower moving then the marines' rounds and at this range most marines had time to duck behind the sandbags before the plasma blots reached them.

"HOLD FIRE!" S Sergeant yelled 10 minutes after Jones and Mendez got there. The marines let up and three seconds later the last few mortar shells hit. Silence fell over the base. "You five," The Sergeant said pointing to a group of marines. "Check for survivors. The rest of you cover them." Now there were about 50 marines at the sandbags. The

rest of the marines spread themselves out along the bases' other defenses incase that attack was just a diversion. Inside a office in the heavily fortified command bunker an ONI colonel got to his feet and picked up is glass of spilled brandy.

"What a waste," He remarked as he set the glass down on his desk and grabbed the bottle from a drawer. "Are you sure you won't have any lieutenant?"

"No thank you sir," Lieutenant Jenkins said as she sat down on the other side of the desk.

"Very well," The Colonel said as he sat down opposite of Jenkins "Where were we lieutenant?"

"You were saying that Hamanee gave up the location of the Covenant main base of operations sir," Jenkins said.

"Right," The Colonel said taking a sip from the glass. "Of course we didn't trust him not right away anyway so we sent a recon probe to check and he wasn't lying."

"That's good news sir," Jenkins said her voice lacking emotion. "We can have one of the orbiting ships pound them to dust."

"Normally yes," The Colonel agreed taking another sip. "However their main base is centered around a goddamned enemy frigate. Then to top it off they have deployed some kind of devices that boost its shield making it 200% stronger."

"Meaning sir?" Jenkins asked already knowing the answer but felt like she had to ask.

"Meaning," The Colonel explained finishing his drink. "That any assault or bombardment would fail. However Hamanee also gave use the codes their drop ships use to leave and enter the base. We also know were one of their resupply outpost are. And we know that a drop ship is taking a load of supplies from the frigate to that outpost at 2300 tonight."

"I don't see what this that has to do with me sir," Jenkins said feeling like she wasn't going to like what the colonel said next.

"You did an outstanding job leading that team to capture Hamanee," The Colonel said leaning back in his chair. "We want you to lead a strike team to neutralize the outpost, capture the drop ship, use it to gain entry into the frigate and covertly destroy the ships engines the blast whipping out their main base and crushing their foot hold. I know this is a lot to ask of you so it's understood if you refuse."

"I have just one issue sir," Jenkins said standing. "I can't fly a Covenant drop ship." The colonel's face broke out into a grin.

"You won't have to lieutenant," The Colonel said. He then moved his head so he was looking around Jenkins "Come in captain." A second later a navy captain walking into the colonel's office. "Lieutenant meet Captain McNeil he will be your pilot. You however will have to supple your own tech that can send the codes and a demo expert."

"I have just the two in mind sir," Jenkins said with a smile.

Back at the sandbag wall in front of grid bravo four Jones and Mendez crouched with their assault rifles resting on the top of the wall. The five marines were in a line 15 feet from each other slowly moving through the bodies, turning them over and checking for any sign of life. Every once in a while one of the marines would shoulder his weapon and fire a round into a head of a fallen enemy soldier. As a marines walked passed an Elite, missing his left leg from his mid thigh down, he reached out with his right hand and shoved a lit plasma grenade onto the marine's left boot.

"MOTHERFUCKER!" He screamed as he tried in vain to shake it off. Three seconds later it exploded launching the marine into the air. His top half landed five feet from the blast. His left leg hit the marine closest to him in the face causing his nose to bleed and his right leg flew straight up and fell straight back down. The marines at the wall opened fire on the Elite cutting his to pieces as a hundred plus rounds tore into him. Just then the two Pelicans flew back over and hovered over the many Covenant dead.

"This is Viper," Viper lead said to all hands. "We are back in you're AO how can we assist? Over."

"You guys fall back!" The Sergeant shouted at the four remaining marines who happily sprinted back to the sandbags. "Pepper the area marked by smoke. Over." He said speaking into his helmet mike. The sergeant threw a grenade into the middle of the dead Covenant. It popped giving off gray smoke at first that turned red as it rose to the sky.

"Confirmed," Viper lead radioed. "Ready two?" The two Pelican now hovered over the marines only 30 feet apart, a 100 meters off the ground.

"Ready lead," Viper two said.

"Guns, guns, guns," Viper lead radioed as both Pelicans opened up with their chain guns. They moved their fire in a zigzag pattern Viper lead starting at the top and moving down, Viper two started at the bottom and worked up. It only took them seven seconds to meet in the middle and in that time thousands of rounds had been fired. The only thing that remained were pieces of different sizes, shapes and colors.

"Anything else? Over," Viper two asked.

"No," The Sergeant said into his mike. "Take five, thanks for the assist over. Somebody get the dozer and push this mess under."

"Viper out," Viper lead radioed as the two Pelicans turned to land back at their pads. In the distance the marines could hear the large bulldozer roar to life. Suddenly all the marines radios clicked to life along with the PA.

"Private James Mendez and Private First Class Allen Jones are to report to the command bunker on the double." Mendez and Jones exchanged glances before sprinting to the command bunker. As they

arrived at the heavy metal door two MPs stopped them rifles held at the low ready. Jones and Mendez came to a stop and pulled out their I.D.s

"Private Mendez and Private First Class Jones reporting as ordered," Mendez spoke for both of them as the MPs took their I.D.s from them.

"Very well," One of them said as they lowered their rifles. "Leave all weapons in the footlocker." One of them pointed at a dented, rusty metal footlocker as the other handed them back their I.D.s Jones and Mendez looked at each again as they placed their assault rifles in it along with their pistols. They then turned to walk inside when a MP put a hand on Mendez's shoulder turned him around pointed at his belt and then back at the footlocker. Mendez unclipped his belt holding his grenades and placed it inside as well, Jones quickly did the same. Mendez turned to try again when he saw the MP rise his had again, before he could place it on his shoulder however Mendez took out his combat knife and placed it in the footlocker. Mendez then places his hands at his sides and spun around slowly once. He then looked one of the MPs in the eyes and threw his hands to his sides. The MP nodded and Jones and Mendez were finally allowed inside. The first thing they came to was a waiting room with a desk and three more MPs two of them lined the wall behind the desk with the door that lead to the offices and com rooms. The third one was setting behind the desk typing on a computer.

"Private Mendez and Private Fir-" Mendez started to say.

"Private First Class Jones," The typing MP interrupted not taking his eyes off his computer screen. "They're waiting for you in Colonel Williams' office." One of the MPs along the wall opened the door and gestured with his free hand. The two marines walked through the door to see more brass in the short hallway then they did their whole cares at that point. They both saluted as a lieutenant walked passed. They walked three more feet before they had to stop and salute a passing captain then again as a first lieutenant also walked pass them. They finally reach Colonel Williams' door and Jones knocked.

"Enter," He said his voice muffled by the door. Jones and Mendez walked in, came to attention and saluted.

"Private Jim Mendez," Mendez said.

"And Private First Class Allen Jones reporting as ordered sir," Jones finished for both of them.

"At easy gentlemen," Colonel Williams said as he leaned back in his chair. Jones and Mendez moved their hands behind their backs and spread their legs shoulder width apart at the same time in a signal crisp movement. "We have a high risk, high stakes mission planned for tonight and Lieutenant Jenkins informed me you two and just the people I'm looking for."

"I'm sorry to say that you are misinformed sir," Mendez said shooting a glance at Jenkins standing in a corner with Captain McNeil. "We are far from special ops sir."

"You misunderstood me son," Williams said leaning forward again.

"Private Mendez you are familiar with the SRS 99D AM and received some sniper training at Fort Hood did you not?"

"Yes sir," Mendez said looking back at Williams. "And yes sir the basics."

"You also majored in chemistry so you could whip up an explosive device that would make a real bang and be unstable enough that if someone tampered with it, it would go off?"

"Yes sir I could," Mendez said very uneasy at the directness of the questions.

"And you Private First Class Jones," Williams said turning his gaze to Jones. "You studied the Covenant language and you could read it fairly well before you were drafted?"

"Yes sir I could," Jones said also not liking were this was going.

"Is it safe to assume you could send a simple message using their written language?"

"Yes sir it is," Jones nodded.

"All right," Williams said leaning back again. "There is a mission briefing in briefing room two in 10 minutes be there. Then at 1800 hours there is a mission prep at the armory. You will attend both of these. Dismissed gentlemen." William waved his hand towards the door. Jones and Mendez saluted one more time before making an about face and marching out of William's office. When the door shut Jones and Mendez turned to look at each other.

"What the fuck?" Jones mouthed not daring to make a sound.

"I don't fucking know," Mendez mouthed back. They walked to the end of the hallway thankfully not encountering anymore officers on the short trip. They came to a flight of stairs guarded by two more MPs.

"Private Jones and Mendez briefing room two is straight down these stairs and the second door on your left." One of them said pointing down the stairs before Jones or Mendez could pull out their I.D.s. The two marines nodded their thanks and walked down the metal stairs and walked the short distance to the hallway to the door marked room two. Mendez walked in first Jones right behind him. The briefing room had two sections of seats separated by an aisle. The two sections had six rows of six seats each so a total of 72 people could sit and listen. All the seats faced a slightly raised area with a podium and screen which several different images could be displayed. A group of 30 ODST stood near the front of the room talking amongst themselves. One of them turned as Mendez and Jones walked in.

"Hey jar head I think you've got the wrong room," The one that turned said.

"Yeah," Another one said also turning. "This is for the people going on a dangerous mission not for little boys."

"Hey," Mendez said putting up his hands palms out. "We got drafted in

to this thing."

"So these must be the specialists," One ODST said. "Just stay out of our way and let the men do the fighting boys."

"Attention!" Someone shouted and everyone in the room came to attention at once. Colonel Williams walked down the aisle and stopped behind the podium placing his hand on the sides.

"At ease gentlemen," Williams said. "Take a seat." The 30 ODST troopers took up most of the section of seats to the right of the podium leaving Mendez and Jones the only ones in the left section of seats. "I'll be brief gentlemen time is not on our side. We have a high risk mission planned for tonight as you know but what you do not is if you are successful we will have crippled the Covenant's foot hold here. The mission is simple in ideal, you men." Williams pointed at the ODST troopers. "Will covertly neutralize a Covenant outpost and board a Covenant drop ship. Then Captain McNeil will fly it to the Covenant's main base of operations, one of their frigates, using the codes we have gotten from a POW. Once on board you will covertly as possible make your way to their engine room and rig them to blow anyway you can. That will be Private Mendez's job as well as a provide sniper support for the assault on the outpost. Any questions?"

"Just one sir," An ODST said. "Once we rig the ship to blow how are we going to get off it?"

"Anyway you can trooper," Williams said looking him in the eye. "Anyway you can." Mendez and Jones exchanged glasses while the ODST looked straight ahead.

"What do we need the PFC for sir?" An ODST asked near the back.

"It will be his job to send the Covenant the correct codes to be allowed entrance into the frigate. He will also double as Private Mendez's spotter. Any other questions?" Williams asked looking around the room. No one else raised their hand and Mendez and Jones didn't dare asked the question that was on their minds.

"Ok," Williams said clapping his hands together "Lieutenant Jenkins will have lead on this one. Mission perp. is at 1800 don't be late we do have a small window of opportunity. Good luck. Dismissed!" With that the marines and ODSTs stood and saluted. Williams returned their salutes and briskly walked out of the room.

3. Wet work

Five hours later Mendez and Jones lay next to a large tree in the underbrush the rain dripping off their helmets, hands, and the barrel of the customized SRS 99D AM. Mendez had known that this mission was going to be bad, he had even known that before it had started to rain in heavy sheets. He had known that as soon as they were giving the new half stealth suits. Even though it was 15 minutes till 1800 the two marines were the last to arrive in the armory and the ODST had all ready gotten their gear and were busy applying face paint. Jones and Mendez had walked up to the quartermaster to check in but he was already expecting them.

"Private Jones and Mendez hand me your assault rifles and side arms," He ordered looking at a clipboard. They did as instructed and the quartermaster added silencers to their assault rifles and pistols before handing them back. "Now please put these on." The quartermaster instructed as he handed Mendez and Jones each a half stealth suit.

The normal stealth suits were state of the art full body suites that were worn over regular uniforms and would change their camouflage to match the current environment and area of the trooper wearing it. Then fake leaves and other plants and items could be added to help it blend into a certain area even more. Not only that but it masked body heat while keeping the wearer either warm or cool depending on the weather and was water proof. However because of how advance they were they were expensive to make. So someone in the think tank thought that most marines when they used it would be lying down so they came up with the half stealth suit that only covered the wearer's back of their legs, their back, neck and head. It still masked heat but really didn't keep a trooper warm or dry.

These were the suits that Mendez and Jones strapped on now as they placed their arms through the sleeves that only covered the back of their arms and strapped the suit to their legs. They finished by pulling the hoods over their head and pulling on the gloves.

"How do I look?" Mendez asked Jones as he slowly turned.

"Well I can still see half of you," Jones joked.

"One more thing," The quartermaster said opening a long case on a table. "A customized SRS 99D AM just for this mission." Mendez picked it up and sighted it.

"How so?" He asked as he adjusted the scope.

"Well," The quartermaster said pressing the clipboard against his waist. "The barrel suppresses almost all sound and emits no flash or smoke what so ever, however it does slow the round down so to make up for it we gave you magnum rounds. They are the same caliber but they are longer filled with more powder to give the round that extra kick. Because of the size increase only three rounds will fit in the magazine so watch that. Now because of the increased powder there is increased recoil, to help control the recoil it has been fitted with a stock filled with a gel that will absorb most of the shock along with the buffer spring. Now the last thing is the scope. It has up to 24x magnification and it is able to switch between both NV and IR."

"Nice," Mendez said as he slung the rifle across his back.

"Also as you have noticed," The quartermaster said pointing at the sniper rifle. "It has been painted and a webbing had been placed around it that will blend in nicely with the foliage." Jones and Mendez turned to leave and meet Lieutenant Jenkins when the quartermaster stopped them.

"One more thing," He said. "Don't forget your face paint." It was all those things that caused Mendez to think this was going to be a bad mission.

Now as they lay in the underbrush as the rain rolled off them, their hands numb waiting for the damned drop ship Mendez couldn't help but think he had been right. The two marines had studied the outpost for the past hour and a half and had memorized the enemy's patrol routes. They also knew that they could engage and neutralized most of them without raising an alarm. The rest would be for the assault team to mop up. Mendez switched between NV and IR trying to decide which one he liked best and as always he decided on NV.

"So what do you think?" Mendez asked Jones still looking through the scope.

"What do you mean?" Jones asked as he peered through his field glasses that also had NV.

"About this mission you think we'll make?" Mendez asked.

"The truth?" Jones asked bluntly.

"Of course," Mendez said just as bluntly the rained had killed both their sense of humors.

"We will take the drop ship for sure I give boarding the frigate 30-70 odds in our favor, planting the explosives 60-40 in favor of the Covenant and none of us are going to make it off alive," Jones explained tonelessly.

"How do you figure that?" Mendez asked risking a glance at Jones.

"Just a feeling I got," Jones said still looking through his field glasses.

"What do you mean?" Mendez started to ask when they both herd a whine. Mendez looked up and spotted a Covenant drop ship through his scope.

"These our boy right on time," Jones said as he glanced at he watched which just clicked from 2259 to 2300. Jones keyed his radio and whispered into his helmet mike. "Dagger Two Five this is Wolf One we have target in sight requesting mission update over."

"Conformed Wolf One," Lieutenant Jenkins said her voice coming from their helmet speakers. "Mission is a-go, green light engage tangos we are moving to point Zulu. Over."

"Conformed Dagger Two Five engaging tangos. Out," Jones said as he brought his field glasses up to his face again. The drop ship had landed by then and the troops in the outpost were already busy unloading its cargo.

"All rights how do you want to slice this?" Mendez asked Jones as he clicked of the rifle's safety.

"Two tangos on the building to the left of the LZ conformed you see them," Jones said. Mendez shifted his aim scanning with the scope until his gaze fell upon a purple prefab building where two Jackals stood facing away from each other.

"Conformed," Mendez said as he steadied his aim.

"No tangos on the ground have them in sight but they will see us take out their outer patrols. Take them out first," Jones ordered. Mendez placed the crosshair on one of the Jackal's head. He waited a second for the scope to auto adjust for wind and elevation the crosshair turned red when it did.

"Ready," Mendez said placing his finger on the trigger.

"Take them both out," Jones ordered. "Fire, fire, fire, fire, fire, fire, fire." Mendez slowly took a breath in and gently squeezed the trigger. The rifle made a soft thump and kicked against Mendez's shoulder. The first Jackal fell down and the other didn't even turn to look. Mendez quickly switched his aim to the other and fired dropping him as well. No one on the ground turned to look up. Mendez slowly breathed out.

"They're down," Jones said. "Clean kills. Nice job." Mendez lifted the rifle up so he could pull out the empty magazine and placed a new one into the slot. Mendez now had four rounds to work with three in the magazine and one in the chamber.

"Next target?" Mendez asked after he had finished.

"The first outer patrol on the outside of their fence," Jones said lowering his field glass to the fence.

"Conformed," Mendez said also lowering his aim. "Where should I engage them?"

"In front of point Zulu," Jones said. Mendez glanced at Jones.

"Where the assault team is?" Mendez asked a little unsure.

"Yes we can only hit the other patrols in the same spot," Jones explained. "There are two and if one of them see the bodies of the other this mission will be over." Jones then keyed his radio. "Dagger Two Five this is Wolf One do you read? Over"

"Go ahead Wolf One over," Jenkins said over the radio.

"We will be engaging the first enemy patrol in front of your position," Jones explained "As soon as they are down you have to remove their bodies from the path and hide them over."

"Roger that, will do out," Jenkins said her voice a little perplexed.

"What about the blood?" An ODST radioed his voice full of disapproval.

"In case you haven't noticed it's raining," Jones explained his voice verging on a sigh. "The rain will wash most of it away, what it doesn't get just slush some mud over it. It doesn't have to be perfect we just have to get them in to the kill zone. Over."

"Understood. Out," The smartass said his voice cooling.

"Alright shooter enemy patrol coming into visual range. I count five tangos," Jones said. Mendez shifted his aim and spotted them walking towards position Zulu. It was four Grunts walking in pairs and an Elite walking behind the Grunts.

"Conformed I see them," Mendez said. As they neared position Zulu Mendez practiced how he would get them all.

"Ok Dagger Two Five don't break radio silence," Jones said into his mike. "The enemy patrol is closing in on you when we drop them you have less than a minute to get them off the path out. Ok shooter engage on your call." Mendez placed the crosshair on the side of Elite's head and waited a second for the scope to adjust. Mendez squeezed the trigger the rifle kicked against his shoulder, purple blood blossoming out of the other side of his head. The Elite crumpled to the ground as the Grunts continued to walk forward. Mendez quickly shifted aim to the back pair of Grunts and fired center mass the round going through both their bodies and dropping them both. Mendez quickly switched again and dropped the front pair of Grunts. Total time to drop the patrol: two and a half seconds. The assault team seemed to rise from the ground itself as they rose from the underbrush next to the beaten path the enemy patrol had just been walking along. Four ODSTs grabbed a Grunt each and threw him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry so there wouldn't be no drag marks in the mud. Two ODSTs grabbed the Elite, one grabbed his arms the other got hold of his legs and they picked him up. As they carried him off the path his ass came closest to dragging on the ground. They hid the bodies in the underbrush and started to use their hands to splash water onto the patches of blood. Jones had been right and the rain was washing most of the blood away but the bright blue blood of the Grunt's stood out more and needed a little more water to speed it along.

"30 seconds Dagger Two Five," Mendez said into his mike as he tracked the other patrol. The ODSTs stopped splashing water and laid back down into the underbrush turning, once again, invisible.

"Good job Dagger Two Five," Jones reported. "You had 15 seconds to spare get ready from the next patrol out." Mendez ejected the spent magazine and slammed a fresh one home once again having four rounds to work with. The second Covenant patrol was just a pair of black clad Elites walking side by side. Mendez turned to Jones.

"Their shields are going to slow the round down too much I can't get them both in one shot," Mendez said quickly.

"Calm down," Jones said still not taking his eyes away from his field glasses. "Just get the other one with a follow up shot."

"What if he sounds the alarm?" Mendez demanded the edges of his voice filled with panic. "Or he yells, shoots, does anything that would give us away?"

"Relax you got this," Jones reassured. Mendez sighed and looked back through the scope and sighted the Elite on the right as they started to pass position Zulu. Mendez squeezed the trigger the Elite fell face forward as his momentum carried him. The second Elite's shields flared and went dead as they stopped the round from entering him. His head snapped around to look towards the direction of the shot just in time to receive the second round right between the eyes.

"Fucking a," Mendez said as he looked up from the scope his back had a sheen of sweat on it but it was quickly washed away by the pouring rain.

"Ok Dagger Two Five your show," Jones said into his helmet mike finally lowering his field glasses. "We can't see any more movement in the outpost looks like everyone is at the LZ to unload the drop ship. However you might want to check the buildings over."

Conformed Wolf One," Jenkins said as the 10 of the 35 ODSTs got up and started to move towards the outpost's fence. "Spot and assist out." Four of the 10 ODSTs grabbed the Elites and dragged their bodies dumping them somewhere in the underbrush. They didn't care about drag marks and blood at this point for they had gotten all of the patrols. Jenkins then waved towards the fence and the ODSTs moved towards the outpost's fence where they quickly climbed it and landed on the other side. The ODSTs hid behind a prefab building and formed a loose circle around Jenkins.

"Alright," Jenkins began her face paint already starting to dull because of the heavy rain "We are going to mop up these buildings starting with the outside ones moving to the inside ones before we hit the drop ship." She then turned her head to the side and placed a finger in her ear where her ear piece was and spoke into her helmet mike. "Wolf One this is Dagger Two Five over."

"Go ahead Dagger Two Five over," Mendez's voice coming back over their helmet speakers and ear pieces.

"Watch the drop ship and LZ and let us know if they seem to be done unloading. Over," Jenkins ordered.

"Will do out," Mendez said. Jenkins then turned to the ODSTs and pointed to five of them.

"You five will hang back by the LZ in case they start to move," Jenkins explained. "If they do you will hit them hard and fast to board the drop ship and take it. If we mop up before that happens we will attack from the other side giving you five an opening to board the drop ship and seize control before they know what's happening. Clear?"

"Yes ma'am," The five ODSTs said at once.

"Alright let's get to work," Jenkins ordered causing the rest of the troopers to stalk deeper into the outpost. Three ODSTs ran in a half crouch making a bee line straight for a building with a large antenna on the roof. The three stop just short of the door and two of them turned and knelt facing the opposite way of the door. The third slung his silenced assault rifle and drew his combat knife the rain making the grip slick. The ODST walked over to the door and up to its control panel. Using the knife he popped the outer cover off exposing a mess of wires and crystals the Covenant used in place of chips and fuses. The trooper then removed a device from his pocket that looked like a PDA.

The Automated Electronic Decoder and Decryption Device or the auto-hack, as it was referred to among the enlisted men, was a device that one simply had to connect to anything they wanted access to and

the device would over ride or open whatever the user wanted. It was also simple to use.

The ODST used his knife to shave the insulation away from two wires behind the panel and connected the two wires attached to the auto-hack, to the shaved wire that were the same color as the ones attached to the auto-hack. An hour glass started to spin on the screen letting the trooper know it was working and need time. The screen changed and a green light shown in the top right corner meaning the door panel was only lightly encrypted. Meaning the pass code and lock weren't meant to effectively stop enemies but rather stop their own troops from going where they weren't meant to be. A list of commands was displayed on the screen so the trooper only had to touch the one he wanted and the device would compile. The commands were pretty standard for a door:

```
_open_
_
_close_
_
_lock_
_
_unlock_
_
_disable_
_
_enable_
```

The trooper selected unlock and then open causing the hour glass to spin again. A few seconds later the door soundlessly opened. The trooper let the auto-hack hang a foot off the ground the wires keeping it from dropping. The trooper moved his assault rifle to the low ready. He turned and slapped one off the kneeing ODST on the shoulder, who stood up and spun to face the now open door. The two troopers duck walked into the room, going to opposite corners with their rifles shouldered. The room was empty but a door embedded in one of the walls drew their attention. They stood on either side almost but not quite leaning against the wall. The one on the right hit the control panel and the door slide open. The two ODSTs walked in keeping their backs against the wall that had the door in it. They had picked the right building this was the outpost's com center. Eight Grunts sat at terminals with the backs facing the center of the room, an Elite stood on a raised platform that over looked the working Grunts. None of them had the humans in their line of sight and they hadn't heard the door open. The two troopers realized this and held their fire. One of them pointed to his eyes and then at the Elite on the platform. The other turned to look at the Elite then back at his comrade and nodded. His comrade then drew a line across his throat and pointed back at the Elite. The trooper nodded and keeping in a low crouch he moved to the ramp that would take him to the platform. He crept up it and raised his head so he could just see over the sloping surface of the ramp. The Elite stood with his back facing him and a Grunt stood at the Elite's side looking up at him and holding a tray. The Elite placed an empty glass on the tray and spook the trooper's translator kicking in a moment later.

"Bring me another," The Elite commanded. The Grunt nodded and turned to walk away. The trooper shot his head back down and moved more to the side of the ramp. The fact that the Grunt hadn't screamed meant he hadn't seen him so the trooper thought about his options. He was

going just to let him pass when he realized the Grunt would see his partner. The trooper gently set his rifle down on the ramp and pulled out his combat knife again. He heard the Grunt's footsteps get louder and readied himself. He then saw the Grunt's shadow fall in front of him and then a second later he himself passed in front of the trooper. The Grunt was too busy thinking about the Elite's drink to see the crouching trooper. The trooper lashed out driving the blade deep into the side of the grunt's neck. With his left hand the trooper reached out and plucked the tray out of the air before it hit the ground. The Grunt fell over with a muted thud and lay there. The trooper removed his knife from its neck as he set the tray on the ground next to the Grunt. The trooper then raised his head up again to see the Elite still facing the opposite direction. The trooper rose to his full height and walked towards the Elite the knife held in his right hand. The trooper walked slowly and quietly but the Elite must have heard something for he spoke again.

"That was fast," He said his voice gave a hint of satisfaction. "Bring it here." The Elite however still didn't turn around but the ODST quicken his pace. Just as the last word left the Elite's mouth the trooper was standing behind him and driving his right foot into the back of the Elite's right knee. The Elite dropped to his knees and was now the same height as the trooper. The Elite was still trying the figure out what had happened and was about to grunt something when the trooper used his left hand to push the Elite's head forward and at the same time drag the knife across his throat. The Elite's shields were not active so the knife cut deep spilling his purple blood to the floor. The trooper took a step back and to the left letting the Elite's body fall to the floor who hit with a wet smack. The trooper then dropped to one knee and plunged the blade into the his chest around his chest plate several times. Blood splashed behind him, on the floor and finely across his face just missing his eyes. The trooper used a gloved hand to wipe his face smearing more of his face paint as he did so. The trooper then looked out over the rail the Elite had been staring from a moment before. The Grunts were still hard at work typing on their terminals not realizing what had happened in the time they had been working. The trooper on the platform waved to his comrade still standing by the door and gave his a thumbs up. The trooper on the ground nodded and strolled to the middle of the room so he was directly behind all the working Grunts. Keeping his assault rifle at his right hip he opened fire on the hard working Grunts. His assault rifle broke out into a steady stream of high pitched snaps as the silencer muted most of the weapon's sound. The trooper started at the left and moved to the right his rounds made a straight line across all the Grunt's backs splashing their work stations with their own blood. The trooper's bolt on his assault rifle locked back as the last round left the chamber. The trooper stood there the sound of the shell chasings hitting the ground seemed to be much louder than it should have been.

"We clear?" The trooper on the platform asked his voice a little above a harsh whisper.

"Give me a second," The second trooper said as he let the empty magazine fall to the floor, shoved a new one into the now vacant slot and worked the bolt. He then walked behind each of the Grunts pulling them off their chairs and threw them to the ground. When he reached the last one and threw it to the ground it gave a shriek. It was apparent the trooper had ran out of ammo before the job was done. Now

content on finishing it he leveled his assault rifle at the Grunt who started to bark and yelp very quickly in an effort to talk. The translator on the trooper's helmet standing on the platform came to life again.

"Please," He begged. "I won't tell anyone just please don't shoot me." The trooper on the ground held his fire until his translator had finished. He then began to smile slowly.

"Don't worry I'm not going to shoot you," The trooper said as he slung his rifle across his back. It was clear the Grunt didn't understand but when he saw the ODST lower his weapon he lowered his arms from his face and looked the trooper in the eye. In one swift and sudden move the ODST had drawn his knife and shoved it up through the bottom of the Grunt's chin to the top of his head.

"Told you," The trooper said as he withdrew his knife and let the Grunt's limb body fall to the ground. By then the trooper on the platform had climbed down and was walking towards his comrade.

"You're a sick bastard you know that?" He said as he walked over and stood next to him.

"So," The trooper said as he whipped the knife on his pants. "Lets finish up here then." The two troopers walked over to the terminals and please a golf ball sized grenade next to each one and pulled the pins. The troopers had just enough time to take a step back as the Thermite grenades went off. Thermite was a substance which burned at 500 degrees and would literally fry any electronics or other import equipment the enemy needed. The smell of burnt metal and melted plastic hung in the air as the troopers left the room and walked back outside into the night air and the pouring rain. The trooper they had left outside remained kneeing providing over watch for the other two. The one who had killed the begging Grunt walked over to him and slapped him on the left shoulder. The other trooper went to the auto-hack and ordered it to close and lock the door. The trooper then disabled the door before removing the auto-hack and carefully replacing the panel cover. The three troopers then moved deeper into the outpost keeping to the shadows. However if things did go to shit the outpost couldn't contact anyone or call for reinforcements. One of the three keyed his radio.

"Coms down, they're cut off." He whispered into his mike.

Two troopers stood next to a pair of long cylinder tanks that had airlocks attached to them. The barracks for the Grunts pumped full of methane. Next to each tank was a pair of Grunts slumped against the tanks bleeding from open wounds embedded in their heads.

"Come on Smithy hurry it up," The trooper on over watch said in a low whisper.

"I'm going as fast as I can," Corporal Smith said as he tried to attach his auto-hack to the tank's control panel but the rain made his hands slick and he found it hard to isolate the wires he needed. Smith had managed to strip away the insulation from the wires he needed and had one of them connected to the auto-hack. He was about to connect the other one when he moved two sections of the bare parts of the wires too close to each other. A spark arched between the

wires and caused more sparks to fly. Smith felt a buzz travel up his arms and hit him in the chest before he fell backwards and hit the ground splashing up water and mud around him where he landed.

"Shit you all right?" The second trooper said as he stood over Smith and looked him in the face.

"Just a little buzzed," Smith said as he extended his hand for the other trooper to grab. The other trooper did so and started to pull Smith up when he spoke again. "I'm just shocked really." The other trooper promptly let go of Smith's hand and let him fall back to the ground.

"When your stand up is over come over here and see what you did," The other trooper said with a slight shake of his head as he walked back towards the tanks. Smith got back to his feet his nerves still buzzing. He picked up the auto-hack and wiped the rain drops of its screen. A blinking message filled the entire screen. Warning halon system active.

"Well that works," Corporal Smith said as he unclipped the auto and moved to the second tank.

"What?" The other trooper demanded following Smith. "What did you do?"

"It seems someone activated the halon system," Smith explained referring to the anti-fire system that sucked out all the air of a space to kill the fire. He removed the cover on the other tank's control panel.

"Shit," Was all the other trooper could say as he stood next to Smith. Smith carefully this time removed the wires he needed and attached the auto-hack. Options displayed themselves across the screen.

Open outer door

Open inner door

Close outer door

Close inner door

Activate Halon system

Deactivate Halon system

Smith chose to activate the Halon system. Another message popped up.

Are you sure? Life-forms detected. Yes. No. With no pause expect to read the message Smith pressed yes. Warning Halon system active. Played across the screen again as Smith disconnected the auto-hack while his comrade watched the door to see if anyone would flop out through the door gasping for breath. Non did. Smith keyed his radio.

"The sleeping gas suckers have been taken care of," Smith whisper into his mike as he and his battle buddy left the tanks their boots

making deep imprints in the soft mud.

The three ODSTs that took down the com. center now hid behind a sloppy pile of the Covenant's purple creates as two patrolling Jackals passed. As soon as they had passed the pile two of the troopers sprang out and each grabbed one by the neck and holding their beaks shut dragged them behind the pile of creates. Each Jackal was shoved to the ground and held there while the third trooper stomped on their necks breaking them and killing them instantly. With them out of the way the Elite's barracks was unguarded. The three made their way to the purple building and stood out outside the door in a semicircle. As one auto-hacked the door open the trooper who had stabbed the Grunt used the rain water to wash away the rest of his face paint. When he had finished the door opened and the one that had auto-hacked it waved them in. Once again it was the two troopers who had taken down the com center who where inside the barracks.

"Hang on a second," The one with the clean face said placing a hand on the other's shoulder. The two came to a stop inside the barracks where three Elites slept. The one who had stopped them took out a stick of black camo and started to apply it to his face.

"Jordan what the fuck are you doing?" The other trooper demanded.

"Getting my war face on," Jordan simply said. Jordan then proceeded to black out his entire face.

"Your fucking crazy man," The ODST remarked as he stepped as quietly as he could into the barracks and up to one of the sleeping Elites. The trooper watched the Elite's bare chest slowly raise up and down for a full two seconds before he fired a three round burst into his head. Blood began to soaked into his pillow and his chest had stopped moving. The trooper then sidestepped to the next Elite who continued to sleep. He fired another silent burst forcing the Elite's brain to fly out the back of his skull. The trooper turned to deal with the last Elite when Jordan held up a hand.

"He's mine," Jordan said now that his face was completely painted black. In the darkness of the barracks all the other trooper could see of Jordan's face was his eyes. As Jordan made his way to the Elite he slung his rifle and drew his silenced pistol. When he was next to the sleeping Elite he carefully rolled him over onto his back without waking him. Jordan then placed the pistol on the left side of the Elite's head and moved his head in closer so their faces were only inches apart. He then pressed his left forearm onto the Elites throat cutting down his air intake. The Elite's eyes flew open and the only thing they could see were Jordan's eyes.

"What's up?" Jordan whispered to the terror stricken Elite. "Scream or talk and your fucking dead got it?" The Elite must have understood some English for he attempted to nod.

"What the hell are you doing?" The other trooper demanded

"Shut up and let me work," Jordan said not taking his eyes off the Elite. Jordan removed his left arm from the Elites throat. The Elite held his tongue even as Jordan used his left hand to removed his knife. "Remember don't scream." Jordan then started to use the knife to carve into the Elite's bare chest. The Elite grunted but clenched

his teeth and remained silent the pistol still at the left side of his head. The other trooper watched unbelieving as Jordan carved his name into the Elite's chest. A minute later Jordan re-sheathed his knife the Elites purple blood spilling down his chest and onto his bed but the Elite remained quiet. "Good job." Jordan remarked just before he pulled the trigger painting the wall with the Elite's brains.

"What the fuck man?" The other trooper almost yelled.

"Come on lets go," Jordan said as he moved towards the door. The other trooper, realizing he wasn't going to get an answer, followed him back into the rain where they joined the trooper who had over watch.

"The only tangos left are the ones at the LZ," The trooper on over watch radio to Jenkins "We are moving to ambush point." A smile of satisfaction crept over her face as she received the message.

Still laying in the underbrush Jones and Mendez had watched the events unfold via their scope and field glasses. Mendez slapped Jones on his left shoulder.

"At your four o'clock," He whispered. Jones turned his gaze towards the landing pad where the drop ship was unloading. Jones saw the problem right away and keyed his radio.

"Dagger two five this is Wolf one," Jones said into the mike just inches from his mouth. "The package has finished and it looks like they're getting ready to move out. Please advise over."

"Wolf one take out the lead tango," Jenkins ordered speaking to all the men under her command. "The five sleepers gain the control of the package. The rest of you surround the package and take out the tangos over."

"Roger," Jones said "Shooter tango at your one o'clock low take him out. Fire, fire, fire, fire, fire." Mendez's crosshair landed on an Elite pointing at places for Grunts to stack creates. Mendez fired only waiting long enough for the scope to auto-adjust. The Elite's body was still falling to the ground when the five troopers charged and boarded the drop ship killing the pilot. Mendez fired three more times taking out two Grunts and a Jackal. Mendez had just taken his eye off the scope to reload when the rest of the troopers unleashed a hellish cross fire on the remaining Covenant forces. Mendez had finished reloading and was searching for targets when the message came through the radio.

"All hostiles eliminated area clear over," Someone reported.

"Confirmed," Jenkins radioed. "Wolf one head to the rally point and bring in the VIP out." Jones threw his field glasses around his neck as he rose to his feet water sliding off of his back as he did so. Mendez clicked the rifle's safety on and picked it up as he stood up. Mendez's back was tight from the hours of lying in a difficult spot and demanded he sit back down. Mendez ignored it as he picked the rifle off the ground along with the spent shell chasings. He slung the rifle across his back and picked up his assault rifle which was lying next to him hidden under some large leaves. The two then moved

at a brisk walk picking their way around the thick foliage. By the time they reached the drop ship the other ODST and Caption McNeal were already waiting for them. A trooper was using two chem lights to guide a Pelican carrying a Warthog. When it was only a foot off the ground the pilot hit a switch and sent the Warthog bouncing to the ground splashing up a mixture of water, mud and blood. Now free of its burden the Pelican flew off into the night. A trooper got behind the wheel and drove it off of the unofficial drop zone and parked it next to two other 'hogs and a Scorpion part of the growing assets for the troopers staying behind to hold the outpost until the mission was complete. Others were busy digging fox holes and placing heavy machineguns. Meanwhile another Pelican carrying a crate of ammo moved in and waited for guidance from the trooper with the chem lights.

"Mendez, Jones gets your asses over here!" Jenkins shouted over the noise of fading and approaching engines. Without hesitation the two marines jogged through the rain and joined Jenkins, Caption McNeal, and 15 ODST by the captured drop ship.

"You can ditch your invisibility cloaks now," A smart ass ODST sneered. Jones and Mendez looked at each other before striping off their half stealth suits exposing their somewhat dry backs to the pouring rain.

"Ok here's how it's going to go down," Jenkins said shooting a glance at the trooper who had opened his mouth "Once we have gotten into the ship and docked come out swinging. Hit 'em fast and hard. The last ones off the ship will be Mendez and Jones after the docking bay has been secured. Once secure most of you will stay behind with the caption while a few of you are with me making our way to the engine room. Once there and secure we will cover Mendez as he works. Speaking of whichâ€!" A trooper who was helping with the unloading and moving of equipment walked over and handed a rucksack, that had rings of red tape around the shoulder straps, and a heavy duty laptop to Jenkins. "Your damage pack." Jenkins said as she handed the rucksack to Mendez and the laptop to Jones.

"You sure you're up for this son?" Caption McNeal asked looking Jones square in the eye.

"Yes sir I am," Jones said whishing with every fiber of his being that he wasn't the lynch pin in this mission.

"Everyone clear on the mission?" Jenkins asked her eyes sweeping across meeting everyone else's'.

"Yes ma'am," Was the general response.

"All right lets mount up," She ordered jerking a thumb towards the drop ship "Sergeant Stevenson the outpost is yours." The ODST filed into the drop ship following Jenkins. The last ones to board were Mendez, McNeal and Jones.

4. Explosive reactions

_ Warning adult content read at your own discretion_

The humans were very uncomfortable as they tried to sit in the jump

seats that weren't designed for them. Also they were cramming more people into the troop compartments then it was made for which didn't help. Captain McNeal took a seat in the cockpit as Jones crudely hooked the laptop to the ships console. With only one seat Jones was forced to stand as he typed a series of commands once he had the computer hotwired in.

"All ready sir," Jones said without looking up "I'll still have to translate it but making my response will be a lot easier."

"What every you say son." McNeal said "Everybody buckle in were going air born." McNeal closed the side hatches and eased the drop ship into the air. Once off the ground and facing the right direction McNeal pushed the throttle forward causing the drop ship to lurch forward. Several troopers fell off their seats because of this. Jones stared at his computer screen waiting. When they were about 15 miles from the Covenant's main base a message of the Covenant's strange language played across his screen. Jones read the message and quickly converted it to English in his head:

_Identify yourself immediately. _Jones quickly typed his response.

_ Drop ship 67THGW76A3 returning from supply drop. _Jones had to be careful of his wording and ordering for Elites speak to other Elites different then say Grunts and so on. The pilot was an Elite and Jones could tell from his word selection and formality he was also speaking to an Elite.

verification? Jones looked at a note he had wrapped in plastic and kept in the inside pocket of his uniform jacket.

_Verification code: 6857456245614768126844A5 _Jones sent the rather long code that they had gotten from Hamanee Jones didn't want to think about how much trust they were putting in a code they got of a enemy prisoner of war.

Code receivedâ€|confirmed proceed to docking bay 12.

"They bought it head to docking bay 12 sir." Jones said.

"Outstanding," McNeal said "just one thing private I have no idea where that is."

"Sorry sir give me a second." Jones said typing again.

Requesting navigation marker to docking bay 12.

_ Granted. _

"There you go sir." Jones said

"Thank you private." McNeal said as a triangle appeared over the front view port. Jones looked back down to see a message waiting for him.

_You tired or you just lazy? _This threw Jones off a little he didn't think he would have to carry a conversation with anyone.

_Tired. _Jones typed slowly and sent it not really sure how to

proceed.

_ You are running a little behind. _Jones stared at this for a second before he had an answer.

_ Those damn gas suckers took their sweet time and didn't know were anything went and kept asking me. It was very taxing._

_ Yeah will don't work too hard. You pilots are just glorified shofers._

_ I'll just have to remember that when your wounded and need evac._

"They bought it hook line and sinker sir." Jones said surprised at his own cunning.

"All right everyone get set to come out swing we will be docking in three minutes." McNeal said as he eased off the throttle. A second later they entered a clearing. Jones stood up to look out the cockpit window and a spike of adrenaline rushed through his blood. As far as he could see was purple lit by dots of pale work lights. Nothing but performed buildings, parked vehicles and piles of creates littered the ground for miles and in the middle of it all was a hovering frigate about a 1000 meters off the ground. Jones could only imagine how many Covenant were stationed here. Mendez was right they could just wipe us out Jones thought. Why the hell didn't they was his next one. The drop ship shuddered as it passed through the base's energy shield.

_Drop ship 67THGW76A3 on finial approach. _Jones typed remembering his job.

Received. You are cleared to proceed to the docking bay.

"We're cleared all the way in." Jones said. McNeal only nodded this time as he concentrated on lining up his approach. McNeal eased off the throttle a little more as they neared the shimmering purple square that was the shield of docking bay 12.

"30 seconds." McNeal said as the front of the ship entered the Covenant ship.

"Try to keep this as quit as possible as long as possible," Jenkins ordered "Right side go up and work down. Left side rope down and secure the floor." Jenkins was talking about the three levels of walks ways around the docking bay. McNeal brought the ship to a stop so the right side troop compartment would unload on the top level walk way.

"Show time." Was all McNeal had to say. Corporal Smith who was on the left side had just hooked his rope to some kind of ring built into the troop compartment. He had bent his knees and grabbed the rope in front of his harness with his left when the hatch opened. Smith and the seven other troopers kicked off with their legs and let their ropes fall behind them. Using his right hand to grab the rope from behind him so he could slow himself down. Smith looked down and could see a very confused Elite who was looking up and trying to figure out what was happening. Smith couldn't help put almost feel sorry for the unlucky bastard as he loosened his right hand to drop a little

faster. The Elite had just enough time to see Smith's boots before they smashed into his face knocking him to the ground. When Smith landed on the floor he shoulder his silenced assault rifle and fired a burst into the knocked out Elite's head. His shield was still down after Smith's boots left imprints in his face, so the rounds met no residence as they splattered the Elite's brains on the floor.

"Light 'em up!" Smith shouted as the rest of the team landed a heart beat later. The rest of the trooper unless as hellish cross fire on the Covenant working on the floor. At the same time the rest of the ODST charged out the other side and onto the third catwalk, slaughtering a Grunt pushing a cart filled with mechanical looking parts. Other then the Grunt the catwalk was deserted leaving the troopers free to charge to the door at the other end and descend the ramp to the second level catwalk. On the second catwalk a group of four Jackals had finely processed what was happening and had active their shields and stood shoulder to shoulder their shields overlapping. They raised their plasma pistols ready to send a volley at the troopers fighting on the docking bay floor. The first trooper to make it out onto the second catwalk was Private Jordan and he saw the Jackals right away and instead of slowly down to raise his weapon he continued forward at full speed, at the same time placing his arms in front of him. His hands hit the two Jackals in the middle of the small phalanx square in the their backs sending them over the edge. The two other Jackals each turned their heads to look at the place where their comrades stood just moments before when Jordan grabbed each their necks and lifted them off the ground. They were both so shocked they dropped their pistols and would have dropped their shields if they weren't attached to their arms. Jordan brought them so they were looking him in the face and hanging over the edge.

"Bye boys," he said a twisted smile touching his lips "be sure to write." With that he let them go, the smile never leaving Jordan's face even as they hit the ground with a wet smack. The rest of the troopers had reached the catwalk by then, saw Jordan had everything under control and proceed to the next door to reach the floor. Meanwhile on the docking bay floor the last Grunt was cut down in no less than 30 rounds from three different troopers. The floor secure the troopers charged into a door and up a ramp where the humans encountered their first casualty. An Elite had rallied what little troopers he had and placed them in the hallway the troopers on the floor now stood at the end of. Three Jackals knelt in front their shields held steady with five Grunts behind them and finely he himself stood his plasma rifle in hand. The first trooper never had a chance as a flurry of needles hit him in the chest and stomach, courtesy of the Grunts and a hail of plasma bolts from the Jackals. He was dead before he hit the ground and when he did the needles exploded causing everything within 5 feet of him to be painted with his blood and gore.

The rest of the troopers had enough time to duck back around the corner. The trooper who was unlucky enough to be right at the edge of the corner stuck his assault rifle around the corner and blindly fired emptying his magazine. Unknown to his or to any human for that matter he had killed one of the Grunts who had charged forward past the Jackal's shields. The Elite ordered his troops to remain behind the shields and then ordered a pair of Grunts to ready plasma grenades to throw at the hiding humans. Two Grunts waddled up to the front of the shields and both ignited a grenade ready to throw when the trooper suck his rifle back around the corner and fired again.

The rounds bounced harmless off the Jackal's shields but it started one of the Grunts causing him to drop the lit grenade. When it went off the explosion caught the other grenade to go off as well blowing most of the group to bits. the two survivors, the Elite and a Jackal, were over whelmed in a hail of gun fire from the marines heading from the top down. The two groups looked at each other. Jordan keyed his mike.

"The bay is ours," the ODST reported "moving to rally point now." In the mean time Jones was busy trying to hard wire his lap top to a Covenant data port. He stared at the panel containing different colored wires and crystals. He thought for a moment before rearranging a few of the crystals and cutting two of the wires. That complete Jones used two wire to jump his lap top in were to his satisfaction the strange symbols that the Covenant used for their written langue appeared on its screen. He then went to work trying to find the engine room and removing any security lockouts. After a few moments a map appeared on the screen and a blinking dot in what was a docking bay to represent their location. A moment later a dotted line leading from the dot snaked its way thought the ship and stopped at a green triangle. The way to the engine room.

" Lieutenant!" Jones shouted over his shoulder "I got the way." Jones turned back to his computer. News symbols played across the screen with great urgency. Jones's eyes moved from side to side as he tried to keep up. As he read his faced formed into a scowl. Jenkins had come up behind him by that point.

"Report." Jenkins ordered. Jones's head whipped around in surprise and fear a unsettling look on his face.

"I know the way to the engine room and I have disabled the locks to the doors but the ship's scanners have already picked us up." Jones explained talking with a hint of fear in his voice "They don't know we're hostle yet but they are dispatching a security detail to the bay now."

"How long till they get here?" Jenkins asked her eyes narrowing. Jones looked back at the screen reading more of the report.

"15 minutes," Jones said turning back around to face Jenkins "it seems it's not a top priority they think it's a malfunction after all we are in the heart of their main base."

"Alright! You two with us," Jenkins ordered pointing at Jordan and Smith. Smith jogged over with a little concern in his eyes. Jordan strolled over with a smile a mile wide on his face. "The rest of you set up defensive positions you'll have company in," she looked at her clock displayed in the green eye piece over her left eye "11 minutes. Take your ques from Sergeant Kelly and Captain McNeal." The rest of the troopers began to spread out and create over lapping fields of fire on all the entrances. Jenkins waved her arm towards a door and the five trotted over to it Mendez lugging his damage pack and Jones his laptop. The door sensing their presence opened for them revealing an empty hallway bathed in purple light the Covenant favored.

"Jones take point," Jenkins ordered "lead us to the engine room." Jones nodded and started to move in front of the group. "Oh and Jones." Jenkins said in a voice that caused Jones to stop and look back. "We don't have time for any of your extra duties so just

straight there and straight back." The two hell jumpers had no idea what she meant but Mendez and Jones did and Jones physical shook as if he was struck. But then he nodded and started moving forward like the good little soldier he was. The group reached a four way junction still without contact. Jones consulted a small PDA synced with his laptop he still carried on his back. Then lead them down the left.

Back in the launch bay the troopers' 11 minutes were up as five Grunts and two Elites(the spec opes kind the ones in black armor) walked in on the floor and they looked very board. The only thing they noticed was that creates had been stacked in an odd and disorganized way and the gas suckers were nowhere to be seen. They turned to leave and make a report of lazy workers slacking off on the job.

"That's right just let 'em go." Kelly whispered in to his mike "no need for a very long fire fight." They had almost reached the door out when a trooper on the third level dropped his pistol he had been nervously twirling. It fell to the floor where it made a loud clatter just before it discharged. The trooper had removed the silencer because it threw off the balance so the report echoed for several seconds before it finely died down. The trooper who was hanging over the side in an attempt to catch it slowly sank behind the create he and his partner hid behind. The other trooper promptly slapped him in the back of the head. The Elites and Grunts had turned when the pistol dropped to the ground but had just stood there in till the shoot had died down. One of the Elites pulled something off of his belt and held it up to his mouth. His mind still didn't know what to make of the situation. He knew something was wrong but he had no idea what it could be. He had just reported the disturbance and that they would need reinforcements when the hail of bullets hit and over loaded his shield and then ripped him apart.

"Hit the motherfuckers!" Sergeant Kelly yelled into his mike. The searched party was cut down where they stood but the damage had been done. "We're going loud. Four guys grab the LMGs from the drop ship and tell the captain to keep his head down. Things are going to heat up. Lieutenant!"

"Go ahead sergeant." Jenkins' voice coming from his helmet speakers.

"Ma'am we have party crashers and things are going to heat up real quick. Recommend you double time there and back."

"Noted." Jenkins said her voice completely cold. "Let pick up the pace." The five stated to jog down the twisting hallways.

"I don't get the point." Jones whisper to Mendez as they ran.

"What do you mean so we can get back to the ship and leave this fucking place." Mendez explained.

"As soon as we take off they are going to blow us out of the sky," Jones continued "this was a one way trip and we all know it."

"Who's we?" Mendez asked his voice suddenly very dry.

"Me and the Lieutenant." Jones nodded towards Jenkins as she took

lead.

"Oh." Mendez said his mouth and voice still dry.

"Take the next right ma'am." Jones told Jenkins. Jenkins turned the corner with the two troopers in toe. The group ran into the first contact on the way to the engine room. Two Grunts were hard at work mopping the floor under the watchful eye of an Elite lining against the wall. The Elite's eyes bulged from his head before Jordan's and Smith's still silenced assault rifles planted all three on their asses.

"Jones how much further?" Jenkins demanded.

"Almost there ma'am." Jones reported as he checked his P.D.A.

"How you holding up sergeant?" Jenkins asked speaking into her radio.

"Things have gotten a little hot but nothing we can't handle- Whitmore shift fire to the Hunters! Jimmy hit 'em with grenades!"

"Keep me updated sergeant." Jenkins said bushing past the fact that things were worst then the sergeant let on.

Back in the launch bay things had gotten a lot hotter as Covenant troop poured from all the entrances. A trooper on the third level fired a LMG through gritted teeth at waves and waves of Grunts and Jackals. His belt ran dry and as he hurried to reload when several needles impacted his face and neck. The trooper who had been ducking behind the simi-circle was splattered with his blood. He rose up and emptied his magazine into the Elite that had killed his comrade, but not before he took a needle in his shoulder plate. The resulting explosion sent tiny shreds of the needle into the side of his face and neck.

"Sergeant this flank his going to fold!" the trooper shouted. The trooper reloaded the LMG and resumed firing. Sergeant Kelly didn't hear him for he had his own problems. A Hunter pair had joined the battle and one of them had charged the gun emplacement they had built out of more purple creates killing three troopers.

"Grenades!" Kelly yelled "Hit the motherfuckers with grenades!" The troopers on the bottom floor stopped shooting as they jerked grenades off their belts and threw them at the berzerking hunter. The other Covenant troops took advantage of the slaking fire to rush into the bay. However the troopers were rewards with grenades going off all around the Hunter. When the dust settled and the blast echoes stopped the Hunter lay in a mix of twisted blue metal and orange gore. "Put fire on those bastards now!" Kelly ordered pointing at the fresh Covenant troops pouring into the bottom floor. The other hunter was busy slowly advancing on Whitmore its shield adsorbing the fire from the trooper's LMG on the second level. When the Hunter had gotten with 15 feet of the trooper's position it raised its cannon and sent a green glowing glob at the trooper. The round hit him square and he began to scream as his skin and blood boiled off. He soon stopped and the only thing that remained was charred bones.

"Good damn it!" Kelly shouted as he jogged back into the drop ship and opened a weapons case. Being the one in charge Kelly was on the

third level near the drop ship giving him a commanding view of the whole bay. He reappeared holding a grenade launcher and a belt of grenades looped around his shoulder. He fired a round at the Hunter's exposed back cutting the Hunter in two. Kelly flipped opened the breach and the launcher ejected the spent shell automatically it landed still smoking at his feet. He slammed a new one in and snapped it shut. He then turned to help the trooper out gunned on his own level.

"Sergeant we have reached the engine room." Jenkins's cold voice spoke in his ear.

"Roger that!" Kelly shouted over the battle as he sent a round down range.

The group had reach the door to the engine room where two black clad Elites stood guard. The two sleepy and board guards were slow to react when the five rounded the corner guns a-blazing. One of them managed to get his plasma pistol clear of its holster before they were cut down. Their bodies slump against the wall leaking purple blood. Jones quickly jacked into the door's control and started to run a hacking program. The door opened a few seconds later and the five charged in. The engine room was huge, bigger than the launch bay. Huge cylinders connected with tubes and pipes stood out in the vast space, they glowed a cool blue. The massive room was empty save for engineers, the single minded aliens would leave the humans be if they left them alone.

"You two." Jenkins said, meaning Mendez and Jones, "Plant the bombs we'll cover you." Mendez gave a cruet nod as he grabbed Jones's arm as he lead him to the first of the glowing cylinders. Mendez took off his pack and gave it to Jones to hold. Mendez opened the pack and retrieved a canteen with a digital read out taped to it and two wires sticking out of the cap. He pressed a button and the ready out began to count down.

"Wow hey!" Jones said in alarm "Shouldn't you have that placed before you arm it?"

"Relax," Mendez said unscrewing the canteen's lid and retrieved another canteen with red tape around the middle, this one void of the read out and wires "the clock is just for show. This is going to be a chemical bomb. When these two chemicals mix they react so violently they cause a rather large explosion."

"Then when you mix the two chemicals won't it explode right away?" Jones asked as she watched Mendez smear some of both of the canteens' contents on the cylinder itself.

"Normally yes," Mendez explained as he poured what was in the red lined canteen into the ticking canteen before capping them both "however I added a third chemical that keeps the two from mixing, but one of the chemicals slowly changes the third when it is complete it will result in a delayed but even bigger explosion. The third chemical acting as both a delay and catalyst for the explosion."

"Oh," Jones said as Mendez stuck the now armed canteen to the cylinder "then what's with the clock and wires?"

"Simple," Mendez said leading Jones to some tubes that fed into the cylinder "once we have left the Covenant are going to be looking for sabotage and they'll find the canteens cut the wires and the clock will stop. They will think them disarmed not realizing that you can't disarm them." Mendez took out another wired canteen and started the clock before unscrewing the cap.

"Then why are you smearing that goop on stuff?" Jones asked as Mendez used his finger to smear more of the two(well really three) chemicals directly on the tubes.

"Because," Mendez said capping the wired canteen and also placing it on the tubes "when they "disarm" them they're not going to leave them in the engine room. They'll place them in a store room or an armory. While the stuff I smeared will still go off and hopefully do enough damage to cause their reactor to go critical."

"Ah." was all Jones could think of to say.

Back in the launch bay thing had gotten even worse. With only one LMG gunner left (the one on the third level) and the Elites had figured out that Kelly was the one calling the shots. That and he was giving them hell with that grenade launcher of his. He was finally brought down with a volley of plasma from a phalanx of Jackals with overlapped shields. The second level was completely overrun by the Covenant on the floor the Covenant troops had pushed the remaining troopers into a smaller and smaller corner. Only the third level gave any kind of defense.

"Yo, I need more ammo over here!" the ODST trooper manning the LMG shouted. A trooper ran two boxes over and opened them for the gunner and linked the new belt to the one he was currently firing.

"That's the last of it." the ammo bearer said as he turned to run back to the other create barricade where his help was needed. He was half way there when a plasma bolt hit him square in the shoulder blades. He lay on the floor unmoving as the smell of burning cloth, melted plastic and burning flesh reached the gunner's nose.

"Goddamn it!" the gunner cursed as he cut the Elite who killed his comrade in half. On the other side of the third level things had gotten worse still as a Hunter pair charged through the door. Only one trooper managed to move out of the way as the rest were killed in a glowing green blast. The trooper ran full tilt into the still docked Covenant drop ship, where captain McNeal was hiding.

"Sir fire up the engines we're getting out of here now!" the trooper shouted at McNeal.

"What about the others?" McNeal asked as he seated himself into the pilots seat.

"Sir I personally do not give a flying fuck about the others! The Lieutenant and her team have planted the bombs mission accomplished!" The trooper shouted spit flying from his lips as he drew his pistol and pointed at the captain "We are getting out of here now!"

"Alright." McNeal said as he started the engines and pulled away from the dock. The trooper keyed his radio.

"Lieutenant! Things have gotten too fucking hot! We are takin-!" The trooper was cut off as a blast rocked the drop ship "the drop ship and bugging out! I say again Thing have gotten to ho-!" He never got to repeat himself because the Hunters had fired again also joined by a pair on the ground after they had vaporized the last human on the bay floor. The four blobs of energy impacted the drop ship at the same time causing chain reactions of explosion to completely destroy the drop ship. The only human left alive was the LMG gunner at the other end, who had seen the drop ship go down in a ball of flame.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK!" he shouted as he drew his sidearm and abounded his post. He ran down a random hallway where he skidded to a halt in front of a line of Jackals with three Elites behind them. The two side looked at each other waiting to see who would make the first move. It was the ODST who moved first. He placed the pistol under his chin and fired the bullet carrying his brain and bone flatten on the inside of his helmet. The trooper fell to the ground blood flowing from his mouth. One of the Elites spat on the ground in disgust.

In the engine room Mendez and Jones had just place the last bomb when Jenkins got the message.

"Lieutenant! Things have gotten too fucking hot! We are takin-!" the frantic voice in her ear said but did not come back to finish his message. Jenkins keyed her own radio.

"Trooper say again did not copy your last." she said with the first sign of worry in her voice. She waited several seconds before trying again. "Trooper say again you broke up did not get a solid copy on your last." She waited again her eyes flicking from side to side rapidly. "Sergeant talk to me what's the situation?" Again nothing. "Someone give me a fucking report!" It was after that when she got no response she made her call. "We're getting the fuck out of here!" She ordered. Jenkins, Smith and Jordan ran towards the door they had used to enter with Mendez and Jones at their backs. That is when the Covenant met them head on. When they had found out that humans were in **their** engine room they answered in force. Two Hunters six black clad Elites, 10 Jackals and 12 equally black clad Grunts rushed in through the door the five were heading to. The first in and to fire were the Hunter pair, Smith ever the good soldier pushed his commanding officer out of the way. Jenkins landed hard on her side but could still see that the two shots impacted Smith. He did not scream, he didn't have time to, and there weren't even charred bones left of him.

"NO!" Jordan screamed as he picked himself off the floor from where he dived out of the way. Seeing his friend die had been the final straw. Having completely lost it he drew his knife and charged one of the Hunters. Jordan had played football in high school and some in college before he enlisted and knew how to take down opponents that were bigger than him. He drove his shoulder high into the Hunter's chest taking them both to the ground. Everyone was so stunted by the move(even the Covenant) that they didn't do anything to stop him. Jordan drove his knife in between the Hunter's helmet and chest plate stabbing him again and again in the neck.

"You like that you piece of shit?!" Jordan demanded still stabbing "Does that feel good?!" The Hunter tried to bash him off with his

shield but he rolled out of the way and jumped right back on top of the Hunter and stabbed even faster and harder. The rest of the Covenant forces had snapped back to and fired on the crazed human kneeling on top of their comrade stabbing him to death. Needle and plasma round started to hit Jordan but before they did real damage he reached down on his belt and pulled the pins on two of his grenades. Still holding the pins in his heads he flopped on his back dead and burning. The Covenant forces instinctly got closer to him to confirm the kill when the grenades went off. Jordan's last action killed one hunter severely wounded the other, killed an Elite and three Grunts. The rest of the shell shocked Covenant forces retreated back giving Jones his chance. He had reach Jenkins at that point and had grabbed her by the arm.

"We have to get out of here ma'am!" Jones shouted as he half carried half dragged Jenkins towards Mendez who was laying down covering fire with his assault rifle and a pair of grenades that finished off the second Hunter and killed two Jackals. The three ran though a hatch that dumped them out into a hallway they had never entered before. Jones pulled out his PDA to check the map.

"Which way?" Jenkins asked regaining her composure.

"Uh," Jones grunted as he tried to find out where he was and where they needed to go. "That way." he said as he pointed down a hallway. The three ran in that direction without hesitation. "This will take us back to the launch bay." Jones explained as they ran with the echoes of the perusing Covenant behind them. He lead them down a twisting path and expect from a very surprised Jackal they hadn't run into any other Covenant forces. "There just through that door." Jones said pointing at a door they were quickly approaching. However the door did not open as they got closer in fact Jones had to skid to a stop to avoid slamming into it. Jones quickly looked the door over and saw the panel glowing red.

"Problem?" Mendez asked as he turned to face the way they had come hearing the pursuing forces getting closer.

"They must of locked down the system to keep us from escaping." Jones said in complete horror.

"Can you open it?" Jenkins demanded.

"I think so, I just need some time." Jones said as he ripped off the panel's cover and opened his lap top. He quickly hooked it in and started to type commands as fast as he could.

"We'll cover you." Mendez said as he pushed over a purple create that had been wedged into a corner and knelt down behind it.

"No matter what happens just keeping working." Jenkins ordered as she joined Mendez behind the create. For a whole two minutes nothing happen giving the three false hope that they had lost their pursuers. Then an Elite rounded the corner and was caught by surprise by the dug in humans. His shield overloaded and he took a few hits before managing to make it back behind the corner. Mendez did not wait for him to reappear as he threw his last grenade around the corner. When it went off it not only killed the Elite but four of the remaining eight Jackals. The last four Jackals came around the corner shields overlapped and backed by the remaining nine Grunts they opened fire

on the two humans. However they were still rattled by the explosion and most of the shots missed. Giving Mendez a chance to hose them with automatic fire and Jenkins to throw one of the two grenades she had left. The explosion killed all but two of the Grunts and all four Jackals. The other two Grunts were gunned down by Mendez. A overloaded plasma bolt, that a Jackal had been charging before he died, left his gun aimed at Mendez but the shot went too far right and went past him to impact the wall next to Jones. The blast sent red hot metal slag into the side of Jones's face.

"Ahhhh!" Jones screamed as he fell to the ground and placed a hand over his face. Mendez, hearing his friend scream turned to face him saw he was in trouble and looked back at Jenkins. Two of the black clad Elites had jumped out at the same time.

"Tend to him I got this." Jenkins said as she threw her last grenade and emptied her magazine at the pair before ducking behind cover to avoid their shots. Mendez ran to his wounded friend.

"Let me see!" Mendez said kneeing next to Jones who was flopping on the ground. "Let me see!" Mendez ordered as he pried Jones's hand from his face. The metal fragments still glowed red and were burning deeper into his skin. Mendez jerked his canteen from his belt and poured water on to the burning wound, Jones screaming as he did. When the metal had cooled to black Jones stopped screaming and Mendez let go of his arm Jones's hand swiftly returned to the wound. By then Jenkins had stopped firing and Mendez risked a peek over his shoulder fearing she was dead, but it was the two and final Elites that were dead.

"Did we make it?" Jones asked.

"I guess we did." Mendez said as he stood and held out his hand. Jones reached out to grab it when two red spikes suddenly blossomed out of Mendez's chest. It took Jones half a second to realize what they were. The true last Elite had clocked himself and drawn his energy sword and had driven it into Mendez's back. The only reason Jones could see the sword's forks was because of Mendez's blood clinging to them.

"Ah shit." Mendez gargled as blood flowed out of his mouth. The red spikes suddenly disappeared as the Elite withdrew the weapon. Jones jumped to his feet to catch Mendez's falling body. Jones caught the body and looked into his friendly lifeless eyes before dropping him to the ground. Jones raised his rifle with a yell of rage and aimed a little to the left and high of where Mendez's blood seemed to be floating in a vertical line. A single round spat from the rifle before the bolt lock back on an empty magazine. The Elite seeing his chance started forward as Jones threw his rifle at him causing the Elite to stumble back. Jones jerked his pistol up and was peppering to fire when Jenkins seeing the entire event unfold fired a shot of her own. The Elite had seen her and had moved out of the way still cloaked so she couldn't see. Her round hit Jones in the right shoulder who fell to ground in a yelp of pain dropping his pistol as he did so. Before she could fire again the Elite punched her in the gut knocking the wind out of her before delivering a kick that sent her to the ground.

"What the fuck?" Jones grunted as he gripped his shoulder with his left hand blood spilling through his fingers. Jones saw the pistol on

the floor and tried to move his right arm to grab it but it wouldn't work. Out of options he moved his left hand from the wound and reached out to grab the pistol when his arm suddenly stopped. As if controlled by something else his arm moved away from the pistol and behind him and dragged him towards a corner where he ended up in a sitting position he back in the corner and his arm against the wall above his head. Jones tried to move his arm but something was holding it in place that was when Jones smelled rotten meat and felt a hot breeze hit him in the face. The Elite deactivated his cloaking then and his face materialized inches from Jones's face his left arm holding Jones's left arm against the wall. The Elite barked something in his language the translator in Jones's helmet kicked in a second later.

"So you're the fucker that hacked into our system," He said his face just inches from Jones's "for that you will pay." The Elite raised he right arm still clutching the energy sword. He raised it above his head ready to strike Jones closed his eyes ready to die when he felt heat wash over him but no pain. Jones opened his eyes to find the Elite had driven the sword into the wall, the forks holding his arm in place.

"Wha—" Jones started to croak when the Elite struck him across the face.

"I'll deal with you in a minute I have other business to attend to first." the translator said in Jones ear. The Elite stood and walked over to where Jenkins lay on the ground and kicked the assault rifle from her grasp before stomping on her stomach causing her to double up. Still using his foot he turned her over on her stomach and kept her down by placing a foot on her back. Then to Jones's disbelief he removed a piece of his lower armor.

"What are you doing?" Jones asked more in shock and wonder then anything else.

"I have heard interesting thing about human females," the translator said for both of the humans. Jones was unsure if he was talking to him or Jenkins. "and I intend to find out if they are true." The Elite then pulled Jenkins pants and underwear down to her knees breaking the belt. The Elite then knelt over her and placed his hands on her shoulders still holding her down but Jenkins had began to thrash and scream. Jones didn't see anymore because he had closed his eyes for he didn't what to see anymore. He heard it however, oh god did he hear it. Jenkins screaming and gasping, the Elites grunts and roars but worst of all was that wet smacking sound that was steady and constant. Jones wanted nothing more than to die but his left arm was still pined and his right arm useless. Jones had no idea how long it went on and nor would he really want to know. The Elite let out a load roar and Jenkins a pricing scream that forced Jones to open his eyes. The Elite was standing up and Jenkins was still on the ground though nothing was holding her down when he opened his eyes.

"Ah I haven't felt that good in a long time," the Elite said as he walked over to Jones and removed the sword freeing Jones's left arm. "but I am being selfish here you have a go." The Elite reached down and picked Jones up by his ammo vest and carried him over to where Jenkins lay.

"Don't be afraid get in there." the Elite said laying Jones on top of

Jenkins, Jones's waist on top of Jenkins's still uncovered ass. Jones tried to push himself off but the Elite held him down, so Jones just lay still. "Here let me help you," the Elite said using his free hand to grab Jones's belt "after all what are friends for?" The Elite, using Jones's belt as leverage picked Jones's hips up and forced them down on to Jenkins ass.

"No! Stop!" Jones demanded in a shaky voice.

"Faster?" the Elite mocked "you got it." The Elite pushed even harder and faster squashing his balls each time. The Elite finely lifted Jones off of Jenkins and threw him to the side.

"Good right?" the Elite asked as he drew his plasma pistol "warm and wet feels great doesn't?" Jenkins was crying as the Elite over charged the pistol and fired a round into the back of her head. "but I still got a job to do." The Elite leveled the pistol at Jones's face "Your turn stud." Jones felt a growing heat as the Elite charged the pistol for a second shot. Jones closed his eyes sure he would never open them again when his translator kicked in again.

"Hold it!" the disembodied voice demanded. Jones felt the heat dissipate then the Elite pointing the gun spoke.

"Your Excellency," the Elite stammered "I was just about to execute this human heretic." Jones opened his eyes again disappointed to still be alive and saw a Elite wearing white armor standing over him as well as the black clad one.

"He is the one that hacked the system?" the newcomer asked "He can also read our written word?"

"I guess he is Excellency." the Elite said dropping his gaze to the deck.

"The shipmaster wishes to speak with you. Tend to his wounds, relieve him of his weapons and take him to the brig." the white Elite ordered.

"Yes your Excellency ." the black armored Elite said bowing his head.

"And no more harm is to come to the human." the white armored Elite said walking away.

"Of course Excellency," then when the white clad Elite was around the corner and out of sight "now we both know it's not going to happen like that." The Elite punched Jones hard across the face, hard enough that he saw stars and just before he lost touch with reality he felt the Elite dragging him somewhere.

5. Betrayal and cigarettes

Warning adult content read at your own discretion

When Jones awoke he was laying on the floor in a holding cell separated from the outside by a purple screen of light. As he slowly got to his feet the first thing he noticed was that he could move both arms his right shoulder had a large bandage over it(they or he

had removed his uniform jacket's right shelve to make room for the dressing) as did his cheek where the metal had burned. Both strangely bore no pain. They had taken his weapons, armor and ammo vest but left his helmet and he checked the time in the green eye piece, he had been out for a little over an hour. He went though his pockets to see what they had left, he could find only lint, but still pressing against his back was the PDA he stuck in his belt under his shirt. He took it out and looked at the screen the map of the ship was still displayed.

"Well at least I won't be lost." Jones said bitterly to himself. He then took the small 3 inch pocket knife he had also hidden in his belt. He had sharpened it to a razors edge and used it to make a cut on the inside of his uniform jacket. Like most marines Jones had heard the stories of Covenant POWs and like most he had a death stash. He removed a small flask and water proof tube he had sown in between the inner and outer lining of his uniform jacket (he had done this to all of them not knowing which one he might be captured in). He opened the small tube and shook out its contents: a single cigarette and match. He struck the match on a tiny piece of sand paper on the tube's lid and lit the cigarette he had in his mouth already. His cell was completely bare so he was forced to sit on the floor as he exhaled a cloud of smoke. He opened the flask that contained two shots worth of the good stuff (it had taken him nearly two years to get enough to outfit all of his uniforms with the amount) and drank half of it in one go.

"Well at least I get one least drink in before I die." he said to himself. The point of these "death stashes" was so if captured a marine could get one last drink and smoke in before he slit his own wrist to spare himself the torture he would endure at the hands of the Covenant. He flipped the knife open again and stared at it as he sipped his drink and smoked his cigarette. Jones finished his drink and tossed the flask aside before he got to his feet again.

"Can't die with a full bladder." he announced to no one and looked for a good spot to relieve himself. Finding nothing but a small grate and deciding that was good enough he unzipped and pissed into the small opening. Jones finished his cigarette as he zipped back up again and spat it onto the ground. He picked up the knife and with a long breathe out he touched the knife to his left wrist and was about to take his life when the sound of clicking heels caused him to look up sharply. Jones quickly closed the knife and tucked it back into his belt and turned to face the purple field. Two black clad Elite stood shoulder to shoulder just outside, one was the bastard that killed Mendez and Jenkins the other Jones had never seen before.

"Let's go human you have a audience with the shipmaster." the unknown Elite said. The field deactivated and both Elites grabbed him roughly and forced his wrists together and one of them slapped a device on them that cause rings of green light to encircled them both. Jones tried to move his hands but the rings only got tighter. With his hands bound the two Elites lead him away one in front and one in back of him. They walked for what felt like hours passing many other Covenant that gave him death stares and looks of real pity. They stopped in front of a door with which two of the white clad Elites stood guard.

"We can take it from here." one of them said grabbing one of Jones's

arm.

"Of course Excellently." They said in unison and bow together as they backed away. The white clad Elites shoved him into the room. The room was clearly living quarters but built only for one and for luxury. There was a king sized bed with a desk opposite a glowing screen sitting on top. Next to the desk was a book case full of hollow books and a door that Jones guess lead to a bathroom. The only thing that seemed out of place was a chair sitting in the middle of the floor, that is where the Elites sat him. When they did more green rings encircled his ankles and waist. With Jones safely secured to the chair one of the Elites removed his handcuffs.

"You will referee to the shipmaster as 'your excellently' got it?" One of the Elites asked.

"You know it's a good thing you left my helmet on or I wouldn't be able to understand you idiots." Jones said smugly. The Elite punched him in the stomach hard enough to cause the air to leave his lungs.

"Got it?" he asked again moving his face closer to Jones's.

"Yeah." Jones wheezed. The Elite nodded satisfied and both walked out leaving Jones alone. Jones sat in the chair only able to move his arms and lean forward a little bit for 15 minutes before the shipmaster entered a Elite wearing gold armor. Jones sat there and waited for him to say something but instead he went over to his desk and sat down completely ignoring Jones. Jones wait patiently for five minutes before he couldn't hold his tongue anymore.

"So how long are you going to keep up the tough guy act," then with some hesitation added "your Excellently." The last word dripping with sarcasm. The shipmaster looked over and then slowly stood up as if dealing with a task they wanted to put off as longs as possible. He took the chair over with him and sat directly across from Jones. The Elite placed one leg up on his knee and folded his arms across his chest. The shipmaster started talking Jones's translator kicked in, but right before it did Jones noticed that the Elite's voice wasn't quite as deep or harsh as the others.

"So you can read our language," the shipmaster started "and your own I assume."

"You know what they say about 'assume'." Jones said folding his own arms.

"I do not human." the shipmaster said. Jones always had to wait a second after he stopped talking so his translator could finish before he could talk. This seem to annoy the shipmaster so of course it pleased Jones.

"Never mind it's not important," Jones said with a wave of his hand "your Excellently."

"Here," the shipmaster said switching to English "So you don't have to wait on your translator."

"Why do you know English?" Jones asked in wonder.

"It is important to know the language of your enemy the spoken word anyway." the shipmaster explained.

"Ok why don't you just ask what you're going to fucking ask me," Jones spat "your Excellently."

"What was your mission?" the shipmaster asked.

"To blow up your ship by causing damage to the main reactor." Jones explained feeling it would do no harm to tell him.

"I guessed that," the shipmaster said leaning back in his chair "all for not though for we have disarmed your explosives and placed them in the ships main magazine." Jones remember what Mendez had told him, how the bombs could never be disarmed and wondered how much of a bang they would make next to the ships ammo. "How did you get aboard undetected?"

"We hijacked a drop ship from a small outpost and used your codes to dock inside your ship." Jones explained leaning forward.

"Who gave you the codes?" the shipmaster demanded.

"Hamanee." Jones said.

"And why did he gave you the codes?" the shipmaster asked.

"We captured him from a shitty little outpost, I was there." Jones said defiantly before he could stop himself.

"Were you now." the shipmaster said something strange in his voice.

"Yeah," Jones said smugly "so what do you want from me?"

"I want you to teach us your written word." the shipmaster said. That was when Jones made his mistake, he forgot the term of respect was 'your excellently'.

"With all due respect fuck no sir," Jones caught himself a little too late but didn't see the harm "I mean your Excellently." The shipmaster seemed a little taken back with the quick bad-wards jerk of his head.

"Sir?" the shipmaster seemed puzzled as he got to his feet "I think you mean ma'am." Then Jones saw it, it was hard to see her curves with the armor on and she was very muscular but now he saw it.

"I'm sorry." Jones said looking down really meaning it.

"Secondly you will refer to me as you excellently, I will not be given a human title. Clear?" she asked stand right over Jones.

"Yes your Excellently." Jones said over pronouncing the last word. The shipmaster sighed in annoyance and rubbed her forehead. She then leaned in so she could speak directly into Jones's ear.

"Do you know how hard it is to get into the Covenant army as a female and then to rise up and reach the position of shipmaster. It's unheard of, so I am in no mood to play games human. Least you forget

that I am the one that had you brought in alive," she said not quite yelling. "And I am the one keeping you alive so if I want you to shut up and listen you will get it?"

"Yes your Excellently." Jones said more respectfully this time.

"Good," the shipmaster said straightening up and with a cheerful tone entering her voice. "I did bring you in alive for a reason: you see I know you were on that raid on our outpost and survived several of our raids as well. I see you are a capable warrior for a human that is. Then to find out that you can read and write our language I became very interested in you. I was of course out raged that you came aboard my ship and tried to destroy it but I'm willing to overlook that fact." It was clear to Jones that she liked sound of her own voice.

"With all due respect your Excellently is there a point to this?" Jones asked very annoyed himself.

"Yes of course," she said sitting down again. "I would like you to join our Covenant."

"What?" Jones asked truly shocked then quickly remember and added your Excellently at the end of it.

"You see I know how it is," the shipmaster said very cheerfully "our commanders tell us to die before giving any information to an enemy. I image you have a similar protocol?"

"Yes we do your Excellently." Jones admitted.

"So don't think of it as betraying your comrades to your enemies," the shipmaster explained "Join us and it would be informing your comrades about your enemies. Teaching your comrades about your enemy so they might suffer less losses."

"You want me to defect?" Jones asked still a little confused and very overwhelmed.

"Don't think of it as defecting," the shipmaster said leaning back in her chair "think of it as joining the winning side. Lets face it how many battles have you won and of those how much did your forces out number our own? The only ground engagement your race has ever won significantly was because of your super soldiers, whatever it is you call them. They may be tough but they aren't invulnerable our records show we have killed at least a few. Also they can't help you win in space anyway. Also you probably want to know why we just haven't wiped you off of this planet."

"I had a discussion about that with someone else your Excellency." Jones said remembering the talk he had with Mendez earlier that morning.

"Let me put your mind at ease," she said folding her arms. "As you saw we have more than enough resources to rise this planet of your filth but we have other tasks we must complete first."

"Such as what your Excellency?" Jones asked. He would play her games at least for the time being.

"Harvesting this world's religious artifacts," the shipmaster explained. "But once we are done we will deal with you. That time will be upon you soon."

"And if I refuse your offer your Excellency?" Jones asked. The Elite's stare turned hard and her voice cold. "I believe you are familiar with a race on board this ship you call them 'engineers'. They enjoy nothing more than to take apart what they see as a flawed system and put them back together in a more efficient way. We have to keep a close watch or they will do it to our own critical systems. The human body is a very inefficient system and I will gladly open you up so they can change that. You will live however I will make sure of it. Then the next day I will let them try a different configuration in till you either relent or they run out of arrangements."

"Oh." Jones said in a whisper his mouth suddenly dry as he tried to imagine what it might feel like to have his organs rearranged and then live with that new arrangement. How truly painful it would be.

"Of course you don't have to give you answer till tomorrow," the shipmaster said "I'll let you think on it over night."

"I'll do it." Jones said as soon as the shipmaster had finished.

"What?" the shipmaster said her turn to be shocked.

"I'll join your Covenant," Jones said bowing his head in a respectful manner. "I teach you my written word."

"Excellent!" the shipmaster said getting to her feet again. "You know I should tell you I know what else you did on that raid on our outpost."

"What do you mean your Excellency?" Jones asked. He felt like he already knew the answer and started to break out into a cold sweat.

"I know what you superior officer made you do to that helpless non-combatant." She said as she removed her helmet and upper armor reviling her breast more clearly in an undergarment. She also had better abs then he did.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Jones said as he stared at the floor.

"Of course you do!" she suddenly snapped she calmed herself again as she started on her lower armor. "Did you enjoy it? Be honest."

"Yes," Jones admitted feeling shamed wash over him again. "That why I feel so disgusted with myself." The shipmaster wore only her undergarments now.

"Come now you were so proud to have been on that raid to that 'shity' outpost before." She said walking behind Jones's chair and out of his view briefly before she came back around into view.

"Could you put something else on?" Jones asked weakly. She turned around with fire in her eyes.

"I will not have a human give me orders." She snapped getting face to face with Jones again. She pressed a button on the chair and the rings of light disappeared. "Stand up." She ordered. Jones rose to his feet as instructed, she was much taller than him and he was forced to look up at her.

"What do you want with me now?" Jones asked forcing himself to look her in the eye.

"You were forced to have sex with someone of my race before." her voice took on a strangely soft and smooth quality. Making Jones uncomfortable right away.

"I guess I was." Jones said weakly unable to look her in the eye anymore. She grabbed his chin and pulled it back up gently.

"Well I think you aren't going have a choice again." She cooed in a voice as smooth as silk.

"I don't understand, " Jones stammered "I mean I...I...I-"

"Shhhhhh." she whispered placing a finger over his lips "don't talk." With that she leaned down and placed her mouth over his in what Jones could only guess to be some kind of kiss. Jones first thought was: why the fuck does this keep happening to me followed closely by: it actually feels kind of pleasant and then finely: well we're all going to die soon anyway might as well enjoy this.

Her arms warped around him and Jones found himself doing the same pulling her closer even. One of her claws loosened his belt and pulled out his shamefully hard member and started gently stroking it. His own hand reached down into her undergarment and felt the softness of her slit. She lead them over to her bed where she broke the embrace taking a step back. She then removed her undergarments and lay on the bed where she beckoned Jones with a wave of her hand. Jones removed his uniform jacket, shirt, boots, pants and helmet still not believing this was really happening to him. He then joined her on the bed and positioned himself over her.

"Remember you don't have a choice in this." she said in that silky voice of hers with a wink. Jones entered her and still gasped with how soft it was as he started to gently thrust.

"Is that all you got?" she moaned. Jones determined for some reason to answer her challenge grabbed her hips and started to thrust deeper and quicker. "Yes!" she cried out suddenly as she threw her head back. Wanting to make it even better(or worse depending on how you look at it) he placed one of her legs on his shoulder to get a different angle. Her hands clenched the top sheet of the bed in a near death grip and her head pushed deeper into the mattress as she arched her back.

"You like that?" Jones whispered.

"Yes." she moaned again grabbing his back and lightly digging her

claws in the nails slightly scratching the skin. Jones then leaned in so their chests were touching and went even deeper. She wrapped her arms around him again but this time rolled him over so he was on his back and she was sitting on top of him. She began circling her hips while bouncing up and down in a gentle manner.

"You like that?" She breathed out.

"Yes!" Jones gasped his hands going to her hips and grabbing her ass in a firm grip. She suddenly threw her head back and roared and Jones felt something wet and warm flow onto his member and onto his stomach. She slowly eased herself off of his still stiff member causing Jones to very strangely wanting and a deep yearning. She had turned around placing her hands on the bed so now she was now on all fours. Jones didn't know what she was planning on doing but an idea struck him. Before she could do anything else he sat up and grabbed her by the hips her rough skin feeling pleasant in his hands the tip of his penis lightly touch her anus.

"What is this?" she asked clearly stunned. Jones didn't say anything but slowly eased into her anus amazed with how tight and amazing it felt. She gasped and let out a small and short hiss of pain so, Jones started to thrust slowly. Soon she loosened a little and was moaning even more then before causing Jones to increase his speed. Jones felt it building up inside of him and because of this he increased his speed yet again. Her moans had grown constant, her breathing heavy and shallow and she had started to push back with her hips as he pushed forward with his. She let out another roar and Jones felt her body tremble, this pushed him over the edge and he felt him go letting out a yell himself as he did. Jones pulled out sharply and flopped back onto the bed breathing heavily and cover in a sheen of sweat. She did the same and lay next to Jones before wrapping her arms around him and snuggled up real close. Jones held her in his arms as she press her mouth into his neck, Jones feeling comfort for the first time in a long time wanted nothing more than to drift off to sleep. It wasn't meant to be as she stood up and started to pull on her armor.

"Get dressed," the shipmaster order. "I'll have you taken to your quarters at once."

"My quarters?" Jones asked as she pulled on his pants. "And where are those?"

"The holding cell you were in of course." The Elite said as if nothing could be more natural.

"I see." Jones said not trying to hide the disappointment in his voice.

"Don't worry it had be upgraded since you were there," the shipmaster reassured. "Get some rest because tomorrow you will be giving your first lesson. Don't worry they are all officers on this ship how you say... 'gentlemen'."

"Why do I have to stay in the brig?" Jones asked.

"It's not that I don't trust your loyalty," She explained the look on her face said she didn't trust Jones as far as she could throw him "it's for your protection. Not everyone on this ship is ok with a

human living here so you will be well guarded."

"Of course." Jones said. The Elite switched back to her native tongue.

"Get in here and take you guest to his quarters." the shipmaster ordered the translator speaking for Jones as he put his helmet back on. The two whit clad Elites entered and lead him out into the hall but did not bind his hands. Making him think that the shipmaster had really meant what she said. At least for awhile anyway. The white clad Elites lead him back to his holding cell this time one in front and one in back.

"You made a wise choice human." the Elite behind him told him. Jones just nodded and kept walking not wanting to make eye contact with anyone or anything. When they reached his cell Jones could see the shipmaster hadn't lied about it either. There was now a bed complete with a table and some kind of lamp on it. Then they had moved a desk in and even a human chair underneath it. Jones wondered where they got it and why they had it then decided he didn't care. One of the Elites deactivated the energy shield and waved Jones in.

"Just one more thing," Jones said as he walked into his holding cell. The Elites must have had translators as well for after a second they stared at Jones expectantly. "In one of pockets there was a small box with small sticks in it did you happen to find it? If you did could I get them back?" One of the Elites only gave Jones a confused look but the one who had commented on his 'wise' decision smiled(or at least the thing that came close).

"You must mean these," he said producing Jones's cigarette pack "your how you say..." The Elite began to circle his wrist while he tried to think of the right word. "Your smokes." he said pleased with himself.

"Thanks." Jones said truly meaning it as he accepted the beat up and crumpled pack of cigarettes.

"What are those?" the other Elite asked.

"There smokes." his comrade said again pleased with himself.

"What do they do with them?" the confused Elite asked.

"Well," the kinder Elite said trying to figure out how to explain it. "The humans light the end on fire, place it in their mouth then suck the smoke out of them."

"Is this true?" the other Elite asked Jones.

"Yup," Jones said sticking one in his mouth and lighting it with the lighter he kept in the pack. "or pretty close." Jones exhaled a cloud of smoke and smiled up at it.

"Why?" He asked.

"Well it's very relaxing and helps us forget about bad times." Jones explained.

"Then why do all of you not do it?" Was his next question.

"A fair question." Jones remarked as he thought about a simple enough answer.

"It kills them." the kind Elite said for Jones. The shocked looked on the other Elite's face and the way he went for Jones made it clear he misunderstood and thought Jones was killing himself that very second. The kind Elite stopped him though.

"Not quite," Jones explained. "You see depending how much and how often we use these can make us sick over a long period of time. So sick it can kill us. Want one?" Jones said holding up the pack open end towards the Elites. The look on one's face said he was both horrified and appalled by the officer.

"I would indeed." the kind Elite said as he took one. He stuck it in his mouth and it immediately fell out.

"Like this." Jones said holding the cigarette in between two fingers. The Elite copied Jones holding it backwards but Jones corrected him before lighting it for him.

"Now what?" he asked as he looked at the glowing end.

"Puff on it like this." Jones said taking a puff and blowing it out. The Elite held it up to a corner of his mouth and somehow managed to take a good amount of smoke in. The only problem his he held it in his lungs. "You have to let it out." Jones said. The Elite suddenly broke out into a coughing fit smoke pouring from his mouth.

"You must pardon me human I must leave now." he wheezed. The Elites both left but not before they turned on the energy field again. Jones laughed quietly to himself as he watched them go through the purple film.

"When you assume it makes an ass out of you and me." Jones said to himself as went to the bed to lay down. Now alone once again shame, disgust and anger washed back over him. Those fuckers had killed his best friend and many other fellow humans yet he had fucked one as sweetly as he would his own girlfriend. When he thought about Mendez he remember the bombs.

"Oh shit!" he said aloud. He looked at the green screen over his eye to see that the first couple of canteens and the directly smeared slim still in the engine room was due to go off in an hour minutes. A feeling of satisfaction crept of Jones as he realized he was finely going to die along with a whole bunch of Covenant. Those were the slowest hour of his life as he finished is whole pack of cigarettes and wished he had more alcohol.

When the time came he neither heard nor felt the explosion which caused his hopes to drop as he watched the timer on his eye piece go from 001 to 000 and he was still alive. Then he saw the purple field start to flicker then 11 the lights snapped off along with the fields to all the cells as red emergency lights started to glow making everything seem eerily. Jones stepped out of his cell and walked to where the controls were, where he grabbed a plasma rifle and belt of plasma grenades someone had left out carelessly. Jones didn't really plan on escaping but rather killing as many Covenant as he could before they killed him. He did however want to make it outside to see

a sky one more time. So he removed the PDA and studied the map finding that the best way down was a garv lift that wasn't too far from where he was. Jones overlapped the map and the root he would take onto his eye piece before tucking the PDA back away. With the belt of grenades fitted tightly around his waist and the plasma rifle in his hands Jones walked out into the hall and looked at the map. When he did he saw the second group of explosive were about to go off. This time Jones felt the deck shudder beneath his feet and an alarm began to blare. Jones looked up to see two Grunts running down the hallway towards him. Must have been sent to check on me Jones thought and he hosed them with blue plasma blasts.

"Sorry boys." Jones said as he stepped over their bodies before breaking out into an all out run. He stopped and ducked behind a corner to let a group of Elites escorting engineers to pass. Then headed towards the way they came from. Jones was making good time when the third and final group of explosives went off. This time the deck lurched under his feet and the alarm increased in pitch and intensity joined by a message in the Elites language Jones's translator told him what it said.

"All personal begin evacuation," the robot voice said "All personal begin evacuation." Then it switched over to the Jackals' then the Grunts' language relaying the same message. Jones had started running again now fearing that the lift would be overrun with Covenant as they fled the ship. He came to a long hallway with a line of Grunts running towards the door at the end. Jones gunned them down the plasma rifle running dry as he killed the last one, so he scooped up a needier as he ran. The door was locked and didn't open for him when he reached it so he did the only thing he could think of. He pounded on the door furiously with both fists. A helpful Grunt who thought it was a comrade that was panicking and didn't remember to enter the door code quickly let him in. The Grunt just stared at Jones before he ripped the breathing mask off of his face leaving him to flop around like a fish. The room was rather larger with a slightly raised platform in the middle of it. Jones watched as a group of Grunts and Jackals stood on it and were raised a little off the ground before being pulled down by a purple light. That left only Jones and the bastard Elite who had killed Mendez and Jenkins(those were only the ones that Jones knew of it) with his back turned towards Jones unaware of his presence. Jones had many of plans for that fucker but fearing more troops would be flooding into this room he would have to be satisfied with his quick death.

"Hey!" Jones shouted as he ran towards him bring the needier up as he did. The Elite slowly turned around and when he did his mouth opened in surprise.

"You." he gasped as Jones pulled the trigger on the needier and held it down. The Elite had not activated his shield and all the rounds left in the strange alien weapon hit him in the chest. The resulting explosion blow the Elite apart splattering Jones with warm purple blood for he had not slowed. He only did so now to scoop up the Elites fallen pistol before jumping onto the platform. Jones felt a tingling around his body as he was lifted into the air and just before he was sucked down towards the ground he heard a door open a shout of surprise and anger. Jones was happy to be outside again, it had stopped raining and the sun was coming out. He was about a 100 meters off the ground and as he floated down he saw a large group of Covenant milling about below. Again acting without really think he

ripped of the belt containing the plasma grenades and activated one before throwing the whole belt down. The belt fell much faster than he did and when it hit the ground and went of the blast hurt his eyes. When he landed he was in a soup made up of body parts and different colors of blood. He looked around for something to shoot find nothing and ran in a direction at random. He didn't really think he was going to live through the blast but just wanted to kill some more Covenant personal. When his eye fell upon six parked Ghosts and two Banshees. He had no idea how to fly a Banshee but he knew how to drive a Ghost. Jones ran towards them killing a Grunt who came out of a tent near them. He looked in the closet Ghost saw that the key crystal was still in it and got on starting it up as he did so. The Ghost rose above the ground and Jones looked back one last time at the Covenant ship before gunning the throttle. More Grunts had come out of the building to see who had fired a weapon and who the jackass was on the Ghost this early in the morning. The first one out saw his dead comrade and shrieked in fright but all he could see was a Ghost getting very fast away from them. The Grunt rushed to his friend to see what he could do for him.

The reason Jones was not killed when he fled the base was that most of the Covenant were still sleeping and figured him a friendly patrol. The ones that were awake couldn't tell he was human because the light was still bad and he was moving too fast. Only the Covenant in the ship knew what was happening, that the ship reactor was going to blow and that a prisoner had escaped. It was sheer luck that the blast from the plasma grenades hadn't been heard by heard by the Grunt he killed near the Ghosts. As he sped towards the edge of the base he turned the Ghost's plasma cannon on a armed check point as he sped by. Jones could hear an alarm begin to blare. He didn't care if he was going to die it was going to be on his terms, but it wasn't to be. The alarm did bring the base up to high alert status, but they were confused why. They couldn't decide if it was a air raid, intruder, an all out assault or because of the problem with the ship. While the Covenant tried to figure it out Jones slipped away.

Back in the Covenant outpost that was now heavy fortified and controlled by humans a private burst into the building the ODST were using as a command bunker.

"Sergeant Stevenson we are picking up a Ghost heading right for us." the private blurted out.

"It's likely only a scout deal with it." Stevenson said without looking up.

"No it's friendly." the private said still out of breath.

"What the fuck do you mean friendly?" Stevenson demanded turning to face the younger trooper.

"Just fallow me sergeant." the young trooper said turning and running towards the Covenant's com building. The ODST had placed their own radio and detection gear in there, set up on folding tables. He lead him to the radar screen and pointed at the dot coming towards them, the dot matched the speed, shape and heat signature of a Covenant Ghost.

"So it's a Ghost." Stevenson said a little confused.

"But look sergeant," the trooper explained pointing at words on the bottom of the screen "there is a incoming friend or foe tag marked as PFC Jones, Allen D. number 349-14-3764 his speed and heading matching that of the Ghost."

"Jones as in the Jones from the assault on the Covenant's main base?" Stevenson asked the private.

"Yes the same one sergeant." the private nodded.

And are you saying he not only survived but stole a Covenant Ghost and is heading this way?" Stevenson asked raising an eyebrow.

"I believe so sergeant." The trooper said with a single nod.

"Well shit somebody get eyes on him." Stevenson ordered. Despite the heavy fortifications the Covenant had not yet tried to reclaim their lost outpost some even wondered if they knew it had changed hands. However there were still snipers around the outpost to have eyes on all the passable routs (and some imposable ones as well) so they would have early warning of advancing enemy troops. One of them quickly found the Ghost and through his scope he confirmed it was human and they let Jones drive up to the front gate.

"What the hell happened?" Stevenson demanded as he meet Jones at the gate. "Report." Jones deactivated the ghost and when it settled to the ground again got off.

"With respect sergeant I am dying for something to drink and eat." Jones said as he walked past the stunned sergeant and the gawking ODST. Stevenson was about to rip Jones a knew asshole when the second sun burned into the sky the ground shaking a second later the roar reached their ears. The only one who seemed un-phased by this was Jones as he walked towards a building only stopping to grab two MREs from a box. Once the light and roar had died down again did Sergeant Stevenson chase Jones down. He found him sitting at a table tearing in to the MREs.

"What happened?" Stevenson asked with wonder and more respect this time. Jones only held up a hand and Stevenson waited for Jones to finish his beef stew and chicken with salsa. Once Jones had finished eating he downed a whole canteen for water in one go someone had gotten for him. With that complete Jones wiped his face and stared expectantly at Stevenson.

"So uh was the mission successful?" He asked rubbing the back of his neck.

"I would say it was." Jones said.

"The captain and lieutenant?" Stevenson asked "or anyone else."

"I'm the only one that made it." Jones said bluntly. Of course he only knew for sure that Jenkins and Mendez were dead and only assumed (the irony was not lost on him) that the rest were dead and if they were alive he was pretty damn sure they didn't make it through the blast.

"I see." Stevenson said and then with a little hesitation "what did you do?" Jones got to his feet then and pushed his chair in.

"I completed the mission and came back sergeant." Jones said the inside joke bring a hallow smile to his lips. Stevenson only stared at Jones as he left to go get some sack time. He slept well for the first time in meaning nights as the sun rose higher into the sky.

With the loss of their main base the Covenant were quickly hunted down and destroyed but it was not without cost. This was in fact the only ground operation(without the use of the Spartans) that resulting in more Covenant losses then human. It was all due to the team that went aboard the Covenant ship. For this they were all awarded the medal of honor expect for Jones who received another silver star. Regardless he was called a hero and was give a big ceremony as in front of the troops to raise morale. He stood in front of hundreds of cheering marines as they pined the medal to his chest along with his new rank: corporal. He gave a brief speech someone else had written for him. Then Colonel Williams pointed out that even after completing such a tough mission which caused him to watch his friend to be killed in battle he still requested to be on the front line whipping out the rest of the Covenant from this planet. What they didn't know is that Jones wanted to die so he sighed up for suicide missions just think he would get killed along the way. They didn't know that or what Lieutenant Jenkins made him do that and he said he would join the Covenant. They didn't know any of that and the only ones that did were killed by a cocky Elite bastard. So they clapped, they cheered and they chanted his name as he walked off the stage.

He didn't want any of that, nothing he did made him feel like a hero. Infected when they called him that it made him feel worse. Jones wanted nothing more than to die so he could be buried(if they could bring his body back) and forgotten. He couldn't even kill himself the chain of command had made sure of that. When they made him a idol and symbol it did boost morale and if he were to kill himself it would go right down again. He would just have to wait to be killed in combat like everyone else. When the humans left this world Jones was assigned a new company and was made a honorary hell jumper by the ODST that had stayed behind in the outpost.

6. Dreams in death

Several years after Jones's tour on Sole 7 and a month after Spartan 117 John fired the unfinished halo ring shortly afterwards contact was lost and the Spartan was presumed dead.

There was a loud piercing beep that drew the tech's attention from the diagnostic program that he was running. He walked over to the computer thermal and looked at what cryo pod was sounding the alarm.

"What the fuck is it now?" the tech asked the computer as he insolated the alert to pod 47 and brought up its report. He was over worked and under paid for his services. He was in charge of cryo bay 3 and its 50 pods. When he enlisted in the navy and chose to be cryo technician he thought he would be getting to use them more. No instead he had to be the one awake to make sure everyone else was ok as they napped. I should have been a marine the tech thought those jar heads always get an ice nap. It was true most marines and other ground combat personal went into cryo sleep while only a rotating

skeleton crew of guards stayed out.

Words and numbers filled the screen along with error codes and warning. "Holy shit!" the tech said as he put it together. He picked up the radio handset built in to his computer station in the control booth over looking cryo bay 3.

"Bridge." the voice on the other end said.

"Sir we have a level one alert!" the tech almost shouted.

"Report crewmen." the voice ordered.

"Pod 47 had a huge flood of adrenaline in his system," the tech explained "heart and blood pursue spiked nearly off the charts."

"Did you administer another round of cryo gas?" the voice asked.

"Sir you don't understand," the tech said turning to face his computer screen again "before I could his vitals suddenly dropped and are dropping at a alarming rate. They have already dropped well below normal levels. We need to get him out of there now."

"You don't mean you want to—" the voice started but the tech cut him off.

"Sir I request and recommend a hard wake up." the tech said his own heart beating quickly now.

"Granted." the voice agreed.

Cryo sleep or more correctly: suspended animation is really that. The person in that sleep is not really alive nor are they dead. Their body doesn't provide its normal functions such as cell reproduction or repair. Also cells don't age or break down at any level, however the body does continue to use some involuntary functions. The heart continues to pump moving blood through the body and the lungs continue to work oxygenating the blood. It's hard to call them alive or dead but some place in-between. However there have been cases where a subject can slip out or deeper into the cryo state. Most cases the subject starts to come out of the state and a simple extra dose of the cryo gas is need to put them back under. More rare are subjects falling deeper into the cryo state to never be awoken not dead but not alive either.

The tech had typed in commands on his computer to start the hard wake up. Ready to initialize a forced system deactivation and reanimation. Command authorization required level five clearance needed. Please enter code:

"Sir I need the authorization code now." the tech said into the radio his hands over keyboard ready to type. To prevent a subject from falling into the state from which they couldn't be revived safe guards had been built into the cryo system. One of them is the 'hard wake up' were the subject is immediately and quickly removed from cryo sleep. It's not just a double dose of the wake up stim and waiting for them to wake up before unsealing the pod. No it is overloading their system with the wake up stim so they are instantly

awake and opening the pod right away to immediately remove them from cryo sleep. It's not without its own risk though as without a chance for the body to restart there is a chance for it never restart and shut down completely. Because of this safe guards were put in the safe guards(only in the military would that make since) and only the captain of the ship can give such an order.

"I just sent the code crewmen." the captain said. The tech looked at his computer. _Wake the sleeping dragon _had appeared on the screen. The tech rolled his eyes he never understood why they had to have such deep and meaning full passwords. _Code accepted. Proceed? Yes. No. _Had replaced the cryptic password.

"Sir I need to hear it from you now," the tech said.

"Proceed with hard wake up." the captain ordered. The tech pushed the enter key and looked at his computer screen that had the marine's vitals on it. His heartbeat and blood pressure was rising quickly. The tech looked out the window to see the lid lifting off tube 47. The tech rushed in the bay to assist the marine.

Sergeant Alan Jones was walking in complete darkness. Darkness so complete he couldn't see his own hand in front of his face. Worse than the darkness its self was how dense it was. When he opened his mouth to call out his words were absorbed by the total darkness. He started to walk but he had no idea if he was really going anywhere. A light suddenly glowed bright off in the distance, as if someone was shinning a spotlight down. Not sure where else to go he started walking towards the light. It seemed so far off but it only took him a second to reach it. Displayed in the light was himself and Private Mendez setting at a table in a mess hall. It felt like he was looking at a museum set up but of his life. The people in the light began to move and Jones could hear the low murmur of mass conversation and the sound of silver wear hitting metal trays.

"So you got my back man?" Mendez was asking the Jones in the light as she shoved a piece of chicken in his mouth.

"As long as I'm alive I'll keep you alive." Jones saw himself saying as he took a drink. Jones remember this conversation it was when he and Mendez first meet back on their first tour together. He was much younger back then as he looked at his past self when the light suddenly snapped off. A second later it snapped back this time Mendez was standing alone but he was looking straight at him. He was dressed in full battle rattle with the Elite's energy sword stuck in him.

"Looks like you didn't keep your promise." Mendez said his voice seemed to echo forever in the emptiness as blood dripped from his mouth. "You said you would keep me alive as long as you were alive. Looks like you lied right to my fucking face. You're a great fucking friend." Before Jones could explain anything the light snapped off and Mendez disappeared.

"Wait!" Jones shouted his voice finding ground this time but not echoing like Mendez's had. "Come back!" A light snapped on behind him and he wheeled around hoping to see Mendez again but instead he saw an Elite. Not just any Elite but the female he meet at the outpost to capture Hamanee. But her belly was large and swollen as if she was...the thought hit Jones like a ton of bricks: she was pregnant

with his child.

"You did this to me you son of a bitch!" She screamed at him.

"No I couldn't," Jones stammered. "I mean it would be impossible-"

"You did this to me!" She screamed again "My husband disowned me and I was casted out to raise my child alone!" The light snapped off and when it came back on a moment later she was holding a monster. It had an Elite's head and chest but a human's left leg and right arm its right leg and left arm were shrunken and deformed. The thing opened its mouth and let out an inhuman shriek. Jones stumbled back horrified when the light snapped off leaving him alone but he could still hear the thing's(his child's) scream. Jones's heart was beating fast and his blood felt like ice. He broke out into a run but a light came on right in front of him and he was forced to come to a skidding stop. Inside the cone of light was Lieutenant Jenkins being raped by the black clad Elite. Jones turned around to look the other way but they were still there. He closed his eyes but he could still see them plain as day.

"Look at me!" Jenkins shouted as the Elite continued on. "You let this happen to me so you watch this!"

"There was nothing I could!" Jones pleaded.

"That's bullshit and you know it!" she shouted. "You let this happen! You might as well have done it you self!" Jones watched in horror as the Elite had been replaced by himself. The sick twisted look on his other's faces as he took advantage of Jenkins scared the shit out of him. Jones not going to let it happen again rushed forward to tackle himself when the light snapped off and Jones felt as if he had walked through a cold mist that left a chill down his spine. Jones started to run again and he felt another light come one but he couldn't see it. He looked over his shoulder and could see the light behind but it was getting closer. It was chasing him so he ran even faster as he looked forward again. His lungs burned his legs ached but he felt like he should have lost whatever was chasing him so he looked behind him again. The cone of light was even closer now and he could see what was in it. It was the female shipmaster of the Covenant ship he(well really Mendez) blew up.

"You think you can fuck me, blow up my ship and then just get away?!" she bellowed after him running full speed energy sword in hand. Jones looked forward again as he ran even faster. He risked a look behind in just in time to see the light switch off relief flood over him as he looked forward again. Jones came to a stop and put his hands on his knees breathing hard. Jones looked up as he finely figured it out, this was hell and he was being force to relive all of his sins. A new light snapped on behind him.

"Attention officer on deck!" a voice shouted from behind him. Jones without thinking smartly came to attention and executed an about face. Standing in the cone of light was Sergeant Johnson and Lieutenant Commander Miranda Keyes.

"You failed." Keyes said sadly not looking Jones in the eyes.

"What do you mean ma'am?" Jones asked confused but still at

attention.

"You deaf shit for brains!" Johnson bellowed. "You had one job: protect Commander Keyes as she retrieved the index!" Johnson walked up to Jones and stared him straight in the eyes.

"I did sergeant." Jones said not looking at Johnson but also looking at him as he learned to do with the drill instructors at basic training.

"No you left us when the flood attacked us!" Johnson shouted spit flying from his lips. "You abounded your post and cost the lives of the whole squad!"

"Sergeant I was wounded and fell behind in the confusion," Jones explained. "I was going to patch myself up and then check up, but I passed out."

"I don't want to hear your excuses!" Johnson continued his rant. "Just looked what have you done to your commanding officer!" Jones looked past Johnson to see that Miranda Keyes had become a hideous flood form.

"Sergeant!" Jones shouted as turned to face him again but he had become a flood form as well. Jones took a step back in surprise and terror to find the light gone and himself alone and confused.

"No more!" Jones shouted into the black. A new light came on and in it was Mendez's screaming face. Jones took a step back as he waited for the sound of his scream to reach his ears but it never did. Jones final saw that it was only his head, his eyes stared off into space his mouth stuck in a soundless and endless scream.

"What the fuck?" Jones whispered as he approached his friend's severed head. A second light came on behind Mendez's head reviling the Elite who killed him. He was seating at a table with Mendez's head in front of him.

"Sit down we have much to discuss." The Elite said. Jones didn't even want to look at the bastard but he found himself already sitting at the table across from him. Jones watched as he used a long finger to poke Mendez's right eye. His finger nail pierced the eye causing a clear liquid to flow out. The Elite then hooked his finger and started to pull Mendez's eye out of his socket his optical nerve stretching but not letting go of his eyeball. The Elite jerked with his wrist and the nerve snapped in two leaving half in the eye socket the other half still attached to the eyeball itself. Jones's stomach turned as the Elite popped it into his mouth and chewed.

"God damn." Jones said as he brought a hand to his mouth to keep from vomiting.

"I'm sorry did you want the other one?" The Elite asked. Jones only gave him a hard look. "Right I'll get straight to the point you and I aren't so unlike each other."

"What do you mean?" Jones demanded.

"We both raped an enemy, yours may have started because of an order but in the end you enjoyed it and you know it." He explained.

"No." Jones said. "I might have enjoyed it but it still haunts me and that doesn't make us anything alike."

"Well we both did rape your commanding officer." The Elite said crossing his arms.

"That because you forced me to!" Jones shouted. "I didn't have a choice!"

"Didn't you?" The Elite asked his voice clearly said he didn't believe Jones.

"I only had one working arm at the time and no weapons so yes I didn't have a choice!" Jones shouted.

"You still had grenades left did you not?" The Elite asked as he leaned closer.

"What are you saying?" Jones asked his voice suddenly a whisper.
"Where are you going with th-"

"I know you did because I took them from you," The Elite interrupting Jones. "You could have pulled the pin on one of those and killed all of us at once. All this talk about just wanting to die is bullshit. Your nothing more than a coward that took pleasure in raping his commanding officer. You're just like me!"

"That's not true!" Jones screamed but the light had shut off and the Elite was gone. "It's not true." Jones whispered to himself.

"Found you!" a voice behind him hissed. Jones found himself standing in a cone of light now as he wheeled around. The female shipmaster was standing over him.

"How?" was all he had time to say before he drove her sword into his gut.

"Sergeant Jones! Sergeant Jones!" the tech said shaking Jones as he tried to pulled him out of his cryo pod. "Sergeant Alan Jones can you hear me?" Jones's eyes flew open and he opened his mouth to scream but what came out was a steady stream of slim. He bent over his back coming off the gel bed of cryo pod 47. The tech had just enough time to jump back as Jones vomited the rest of the slim from his throat. Jones took a deep breath and then dry heaved in till he felt like his eyes were going to pop out.

"What? Where am?" Jones tried to say before he fell to the floor and broke out into a coughing fit.

"Just take it easy sergeant," the tech said as he helped Jones to a sitting position. "we had to wake you up very quickly. This shocked your body pretty good and it will be some time before you feel normal again." The tech shinned a small light into Jones's eyes to check his pupil response. Jones saw the light click on and lost it.

"No!" he screamed in fear and anger as he rushed the tech. Jones tackled the tech and tried to choke him.

"What the hell are you doing!" the tech shouted as he held Jones up

keeping his hands away from his throat. The tech threw Jones off of him and he landed in a heap next to his open cryo pod.

"No don't let them get me." Jones managed just before he passed out. The tech just looked at Jones's naked body cover in the cryo slim and felt nothing but pity for him. The tech walked over to intercom and pushed the talk button.

"This is Wallas in cryo bay 3 I need medical personal here immediately." the tech said into the box then letting go of the button. "What were you dreaming about?" the tech whispered to himself.

Jones awoke in a clean and comfortable hospital bed. The bright white lights blinded him at first and then his eyes adjusted. He went to use his hand to rub his eyes but it was brought up short by a handcuff as the chain was pulled taut. Jones tried his other hand but this was also handcuffed to the bed.

"Good you're awake," a navy doctor said walking over to Jones before he could say anything.

"What happened?" He asked looking up at the doctor.

"That's the million dollar question isn't," the doctor said as he wrote something down on a clip board. "Do you remember anything?"

"I went into cryo sleep," Jones said trying to remember. "Now I'm here."

"You don't remember having to be taken out of cryo sleep and attacking the cryo technician?" the doctor asked raising an eyebrow.

"I did what?" Jones asked now full awake and tried to sit up but the handcuffs held him in place.

"I'll take that as a no," the doctor said writing again. "Do you remember your cryo dream then?"

For a long time there were large debates if people dreamed while in cryo sleep. Many said no since a person is neither dead or alive in cryo sleep. Others said yes however as they had dreams themselves. The first group countered with that they were only dreaming during the wake up process when they came out of cryo sleep. This seemed to have weight as the second group only seemed to dream right before they woke up. However later on soldiers started to report horrifying dreams that seemed completely real. Studies were conducted as the number increased as the war raged on. It was found that while not alive nor dead a person's subconscious remains active just like in normal sleep. However unlike normal sleep it isn't random but rather the person sees how they truly feel about themselves, others, or events from their past. Also unlike normal dreams they are ten times more real to the point where someone couldn't tell the difference between them and reality. Even worse is that a person can completely succumb to them going mad or even die. They also found that this is linked to stresses brought on from combat and other factors.

"No." Jones said looking away. The truth be told he did remember, he remember every detail and he surely wish he hadn't.

"Well you have a appointment with a combat shrink in an hour," The doctor said walking over to Jones. "I'm going to remove your handcuffs now. We only did it to get you from hurting yourself." The doctor unlocked his cuffs and Jones shakily got to his feet. He nodded his thanks to the doctor and walked over to the showers. As the warm water flowed over his head he thought about what the Elite had said. It had been years since he had thought about that night but he did remember being issued four grenades and not using any of them.

"No!" Jones shouted punching the tile wall. "I could have reached the pin I could have killed all three of us." Jones felt a shame wash over him he hadn't felt in years maybe I did let it happen he thought. No he thought as he punched the wall again splitting his knuckle I didn't want to, I didn't remember my grenades I only did now because of hind sight. He turned the water off and grabbed a towel to dry off. As he did his mind kept going over and over what the Elite had said no matter how much he wanted to forget. He changed into his uniform and boots feeling a little better as he did so. He walked to the shrink's office and took a seat in a chair just outside. He wondered how long he would have to wait when he heard the door open.

"Sergeant Jones when your ready please step into my office," the shrink said sticking his head through the open door. Jones sighed as he stood up and walked into his office. It was a typical office had the chairs, a desk, and the couch. Jones took a seat in the chair completely refusing to lay on the couch.

"So tell me a little about yourself." the shrink said sitting opposite of him.

"I'm a sergeant in the UNSC Marine core," Jones said smugly as he crossed his arms.

"Of course you are," the shrink said writing something down on a pad of paper. "Tell me when you enlisted?"

"Haven't you already read my file?" Jones asked.

"Yes I have," the shrink said. "But it helps break the ice when you talk about things I already know."

"As you know I was drafted at the age of 18," Jones explained. "If fact I had just turned and went out that night got piss poor drunk and went back home. When I woke up the next morning the letter was already on my computer. I didn't even get a week off before I had to report."

"Tell me about basic training." the shrink encouraged.

"Hang on I'm telling you my life's story and I don't even know your fucking name." Jones spat.

"Fox," the shrink said. "My name is Fox."

"First or last name?" Jones asked.

"Last," Fox said. "Now tell me about basic training."

"It fucking sucked," Jones said. "I learned how to shoot shit, blow shit up, fight shit, eat stuff that tasted like shit and sleep like shit."

"I see," Fox said writing again. "Now I would like to get to the root of your issue. Tell me about your tour on Sole 7 and more to the point the raid in which you captured Hamanee."

"What makes you think that's the root of my issues?" Jones asked trying to keep his face neutral but his eyes widen and then narrowed Fox caught this and made a note.

"In your file you mentioned earlier you said you were drafted," Fox explained. "You acted pretty much like a draftee completely unremarkable entail that mission. After that you started to receive medals and volunteered for suicide missions."

"I don't want to talk about it," Jones said breaking eye contact.

"Why is that?" Fox asked writing again.

"Because nothing happen," Jones almost shouted.

"I see," Fox nodded and adding something else on the pad before turning the page.

Fox wasn't the best combat shrink on this ship because he was a good listener. What made him the best was that he was formally a ONI lieutenant specializing in interrogation. It wasn't just that which caused him to knew that Jones was lying. He had also served a tour on Sole 7 and had in fact gotten the codes out of Hamanee. However before he did Hamanee had gone on and on about how a human had violated his wife because of a command from a human he had violated. Of course he didn't believe him but when he saw how PFC Jones was acting after the mission and Jenkins's medic records showed she was treated for injuries that matched with what the Elite had said. When he was assigned Jones's case he was very curious to see what he said.

"That right," Jones said.

"That's fine can you tell me about the assault on the Covenants nerve center on Sole 7. It was the first suicide mission you volunteered for and the first mission you had command responsibility." Fox said.

"All right what harm could it do?" Jones said shrugging. "It was only two days after the mission on their(the Covenant's) main base." His eyes half glazed over as his mind took him back there as Fox wrote on his pad as he listened to Jones recall the mission.

7. Memories

Several years ago: two days after the destruction of the Covenant's main base on planet Sole 7.

Jones looked his team over as they stood in the armory around a

table. They were all very young, the oldest was only 19 the youngest was just 17 (he got a weaver and the UNSC were happy to take him) not that Jones was much older. He was just 22 himself but he had seen four years of combat while this was their first combat tour. Sure they had held their own in the Covenant's attempted assaults on the base but they have never gone on the offensive.

"Ok see this stuff," Jones said pointing at the table they were circled around. On it were cans of C14 foaming explosive, detonators, incendiary grenades, a box of small ball bearings, and metal shells Jones made himself in the machine shop. Jones was starting to like these suicide mission they gave him free range at the armory. "Well hang on does anyone even know what a Claymore mine is?" By the blank stares he got he guessed no.

"Uh no corporal," Private Hall the 17 year old said. Although Jones's pining ceremony wouldn't be for a few more days he was already wearing the rank and the responsibility. Jones smiled at the kid.

"Look," Jones said "I know I'm a NCO now but just call me Jones."

"Yes Corporal Jones," Hall said at parade rest. Jones sighed but carried on.

"The Claymore mine is a very old style mine that is no longer used," Jones started.

"What does it do?" PFC Padgett asked.

"I was just getting to that," Jones said shooting him a death glare. "It is a directional explosive device that is perfect for our part in tonight's mission."

"If they are old and aren't used anymore how do you know about them?" Padgett asked.

"A friend," Jones said as his mind flashed to Mendez. "Now put them together like this." Jones took the back piece (he had engraved 'back' on it) and sprayed a rectangle of the C14 on it. He then took the front piece (also engraved 'front') and sprinkled a layer of ball bearings. Then opened one of the incendiary grenades and poured the powder over the ball bearings. Then taking a copper plat he sealed the ball bearing powder mixture in to the front piece. Placing the back and front together he took them over to the welder he brought over from the machine shop and welded them together. That complete he took it back to the table and stuck a remote detonator in a hole that went right to the C14.

"Complete," Jones said. "Of course this is crudely made with some modifications and I have no idea if it will work right if it works at all. Let's go find out shall we?" Jones lead them outside and to the range where targets were set up at 25, 50, 100, 150, 200, 250 and 300 meters. He set it up with the front piece towards the targets. He pulled the safety pin arming the detonator.

"Alright get back," Jones ordered as he lead them behind the barrier of sandbags. "Everybody down." Jones hit the remote detonator, there was a slight delay just long enough to cause Jones to worry and for

them to look up when it went off. The resulting explosion caused their ears to ring and completely destroyed the 25 and 50 meter targets. The 100 and 150 meter targets were burning, upon closer examination the 200 and 250 were also hit the 250 only lightly pepper though. The 300 meter target only had a few holes in it but most were from bullets. Jones made a note of all this and wrote it down on a small notepad.

"So what did we learn?" Padgett asked.

"That the effective kill range is 50 meters," Jones explained looking at his notepad. "With a max of 100 meters. The total max range seems to be roughly 250 meters although I don't think it will kill them."

"Now what?" Hall asked Jones.

"Now we go back to the armory and you make the rest of them the way I showed you. Then give them to me to weld and add the detonator." The eight marines walked back to the armory passing another heavily loaded eight marines walking out. Each of them cared to reloads for the M41 (jackhammer) rocket launcher as only four of them cared the launchers. Two cared SRS sniper rifles plus the ammo for them. The last two cared 88 mm man portable mortars and boxes of their shells. They cared all that plus food, water, standard rifles and ammo. The eight slowly boarded a Pelican and they watched it flew off.

"That must be our heavy support squad for tonight," Jones remarked.

"But it's not even night yet." Private Holloway said confused.

"They have to be completely set up before we get there and as you can see they are heavily loaded. The Pelican can't get to close so they'll have a lot of walking to do. Now quit stalling at get in there and make the rest of the Claymores." Jones ordered pointing at the armory. It took them 15 minutes to make the rest of the Claymores for a total of 16, two of each of them. When they were done Jones dismissed them to get some rest before tonight ordering them to be back at the armory by 2000. Jones himself went to the mess hall to get something to eat, for he knew he wouldn't be able to relax. He grabbed a tray and walked up to the counter, because he was a NCO he got to go a separate line. The food wasn't any better (he wasn't an officer) but it was shorter. Jones took a seat at an empty table and started to eat the lukewarm paste.

"This seat taken?" a voice said. Jones looked up to Sergeant Stevenson standing over him holding his own tray.

"No Gunnery Sergeant," Jones said. "Please take a seat." Stevenson took the seat across from Jones and started to eat himself.

"Thank you corporal," Stevenson said between bites. Jones nodded and they both continued to eat in silence. Jones finished eating and went to get up when Stevenson spoke up again.

"Take a seat corporal we have things to discuss." Stevenson said still eating.

"Of course sergeant," Jones said seating down again.

"How do you like your new stripe?" Stevenson asked pointing to Jones's rank.

"I wondering why they skipped lance corporal and jumped me straight to corporal," Jones said.

"That's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about," Stevenson said putting his fork down. "You have what three years in?"

"Four," Jones corrected.

"That's my point you have four years in and your were only a PFC," Stevenson said. "With you combat record-"

"Expect for some minor skirmishes I haven't won any battles in till this tour," Jones explained.

"Don't interpret me again," Stevenson said his voice taking on a hard tone. "It doesn't matter if you win or lose experience is experience." Jones waited a few seconds before saying something.

"I was on the way to becoming lance," Jones started this time Stevenson interpreted.

"Right then that 'incident' with the ship's AI busted you back down to private," Stevenson said. Jones winched he thought that charge would have been removed from his record by now.

A few years ago before the war with the Covenant broke out an AI company bought out a porno company. They set out to 'revolutionize' the porn industry. Before there were only videos and later on holograms, but they wanted to take it to the next level. Life size AI that could actually be fucked. No one knows how they did some said special particles some said some kind of gas. The point is they made an AI that you could still look though but felt sold when touched. Needless to say they were a huge hit and they couldn't make enough to keep up with demand. When the war started with the Covenant and all AIs were need for the war effort the company stopped making them and started to pump out regular AIs. The few 'Sex' AIs they had made people hung on to knowing they would not be making anymore soon.

Before Jones was a ground pounder he was a fleet marine stationed aboard a ship the Eagle's Claw. A fleet marine was better and worse than a ground beds, hot showers, good food, and unless the ship was boarded they wouldn't have to fight Covenant up close. The down side is that many marines died without getting a chance to fight because their ship was destroyed. Jones's platoon had the next two days off so they were celebrating pretty hard in their bunkroom. Reynolds had gotten a hold of some alcohol (he had a friend in supply) and they were all pretty drunk including Jones. Jones had stared the party talking to Thomas about the 'Sex' AIs when Thomas had told him he had one. Jones found it disgusting and couldn't understand why anyone would find that appealing. Later as time went on and Jones got drunker it started to sound more appealing to him.

"Come on man," Jones pleaded hang heavily on Thomas's shoulder. "You have got to let me try it."

"Alright man," Thomas said. "Just get off of me." Jones did as instructed and let go of Thomas and started to sway on his feet. A moment later a female AI appeared in the middle of the room.

"She's beautiful!" Jones shouted loudly causing every one took look at him as he ran over to her. He pulled out his member and tried several times to stick it into her but missed because of his current state. He finally managed to get it and started to thrust.

"You lied I don't feel anything!" Jones shouted over his shoulder at Thomas. Thomas wore a look of shock on his face as did everyone else.

"Dude," Thomas said his voice suddenly very dry. "That's the ship's AI." Jones now wore the look of shock as he backed away forgetting to zip up his pants.

"Lance Corporal Jones what were you doing?" She asked him in a smooth cool voice.

"Ah ma'am I was just uhh...well you see...I... don't... know." Jones stammered.

"I just wanted to inform you all that your two days of leave are concealed and you all have to report for duty tomorrow," She said just before she disappeared. The AI made a full report about Jones and he got his ass chewed for half an hour and got busted down to private. Along with that they took a month's pay away from him and he found himself in a ground combat company. It wasn't all bad three weeks later the Eagle's Claw was destroyed and Jones met Mendez.

"I thought that was off my record now," Jones told Stevenson.

"Don't worry," Stevenson said cracking a real smile. "That wasn't the worse thing I have ever seen someone get busted for. Still four years you should be pushing sergeant now, but you kept your head down but fighting hard. You don't stand out but you didn't hide behind others either. A typical draftee. In till that mission Lieutenant Jenkins pulled you along on. Some would say you have become reckless. Every heard the term 'suicide by combat', so what happened?" Jones stared at Stevenson for awhile before coming up with his answer.

"Sergeant," Jones started. "That was the first mission where we were on the attack for once. Not a counter attack or vanguard to cover a retreating force but an all attack for once. I just want to feel that rush again." Jones looked Stevenson in the eyes as he waited to see if he would buy it.

"Very well," Stevenson as he stood carrying his tray. "Just remember you know have other marines under your command this time." Jones nodded as he stood himself. He dropped his tray off and walked back to his tent. He went to his bunk stopping to look at the top one where Mendez used to sleep. He managed to get a few hours of fitful sleep before meeting his team at the armory. They all put on half stealth suits and face paint once again. Jones had Hall carry the LMG and Padgett a shotgun the rest got standard assault rifles. They didn't even get silencers for most of them were lost on the last mission Jones was on. What few they did have left went to Stevenson

and his two teams. Of the 32 going on the mission 16 were marines eight were the heavy support that already left. The other eight were with Jones, the last 16 were ODST under the command of Gunnery Sergeant Stevenson. They would be handling the meat of the mission while the marines would support them.

"Alright you two stuck to each other like glue got it," Jones ordered pointed at Hall and Padgett.

"Yes Corporal Jones," Hall said.

"You got it," Padgett said.

"Listen to me," Jones said address the group. "I can't promise I'll get you all back in one piece but I will try my damnist. You have to do as I say when I say it got it?"

"Yes corporal!" they shouted in unison. Jones lead them aboard the waiting Pelican as Stevenson's group entered the armory. His group was going to be the last group out even though they had the most 'dangerous' and most 'important' part of the mission. As the Pelican rose into the air Jones looked into the night sky just before the hatch closed.

"ETA 20 minutes team leader," the pilot said over the radio.

"Roger sir," Jones said. Those 20 minutes would have been in silence if Jones didn't take out his PDA and place a tiny disk inside. Music began to pour out of its small speaker.

"The fuck is this?" Holloway asked clearly not approving of Jones's music choice.

"Helicopter music," Jones explained calmly.

"What the hell is a helicopter?" Holloway asked more confused.

"Never mind," Jones said. Mendez had a real thing for very old movies his favorite was about a commando team and their very buff leader hunting an invisible alien. The irony was not lost on Jones. In an earlier part of that movie they were riding in what Mendez called a helicopter but what the leader called a 'chopper' with a song playing in the back ground. This was the same song that came from Jones PDA. It took Mendez over three months to find that song and he always wanted to play it while they rode in the back of a Pelican. Now Jones played it in honor of him. The song didn't last the whole 20 minutes but Mendez had other songs from other movies lined up.

"30 seconds to dirt," the pilot said. Jones turned the music off.

"Ok tighten up," Jones said. "When we land get out and find cover." The Pelican shuddered as it hovered over the LZ. The ramp dropped and the marines rushed out. The pilot flooded the engines with fuel and the drop ship flew off in the night sky. Jones looked around and saw that their definition of cover was forming a small semi-circle and taking a knee. Jones sigh as he walked over when Private Von turned on his flash light. Jones ran over to him and almost tackled him as he covered the flash light with his hand.

"No lights," Jones whispered to him face to face. "No lights and no talking were are trying to catch them off guard. Wedge formation let's move." Jones ordered as he consulted the map in his eye piece. They formed a wedge and stated moving the way Jones had indicated.

"Walk heel to toe," Jones ordered frustrated at how much noise they were making. "Slow down, don't take such large steps, keep your foot as low to the ground as possible, and for fucks sake try not to step on ever stick in this damn forest." 10 minutes later the marines reached the tree line and only a open field lay beyond. Jones ordered them down as he placed his field glasses up to his eyes. In the green glow of the night vision setting Jones could make out the mesa and the hill next to it.

The Covenant had chose the location for their main ops center well. The mesa's steep sides and large flat top make the only real way to assault it by air. They knew this however and there were several anti air batteries up on the mesa. Not only that but it severed as a hub for their Banshees and a communication center. They had lost three Pelicans on recon flights to find this place.

"Ok," Jones said on his teams radio frequency. "I set a rally point you should see it on your HUD. Stay low and move slowly towards it staying in your lane. Do not bunch up in till you reach the RP. Recon flights have confirmed that the Covenant are getting tired of us sneaking into their bases so they have placed Grunts armed with some kind of scanning device in fox holes around the mesa. That's what the suits are for, we all know how Grunts like their sleep so sneak up on them and kill them quietly. Remember if they detect us this mission is over. Move out."

Jones lay on his stomach and started to inch his way towards the mesa. The ground was still soft from the rain two days again and Jones could feel the mud creeping into his pockets. As he did in basic he thought about all the times he had played 'army' as a kid and all the times he willingly crawled on the ground. He felt a small smile start to form on his face as he squinted in the darkness. When he did he saw the lip of a hole in front of him. Jones slowly removed his combat knife and placed into his teeth to free up his hands as he crept up on the hole. When he reached it he slowly looked over the edge. Curled in a tiny ball was a Grunt fast a sleep with a small device sitting in front of him. To Jones's satisfaction the screen was blank and the device was giving off no alarm proof the suits were working. Jones pulled the knife out of his teeth and drove it into the top of the Grunt's head. Jones pulled the knife out with a grunt and to make sure the bastard was dead he removed his breathing mask. Jones put the knife away and started crawling again. When Jones reached the rally point he sat up and was happy that he was the last one to arrive.

"Good to see you," Padgett whispered.

"Nice to see your ugly face," Jones whispered back. "Anyone else kill any Grunts on the way here?" Two other marines raised their hands, Jones nodded satisfied.

"This is Sandman we have reached first RV point requesting mission update," Jones said speaking into his helmet mike.

"Roger Sandman mission is a go," Stevenson's voice coming over Jones's ear piece.

"Understood," Jones said turning to Padgett. "You're up just like we talked about."

"No problem," Padgett said as he took the coil of rope he was wearing across his body from his left shoulder to his right hip. He untied it and stretched it out on the ground before adding an adapter to the barrel of his shotgun. He stuck the grappling hook into the adapter and clipped the end of the rope to it. There was a loud crack as he loaded in the special shotgun shell into the chamber. Padgett nodded at Jones as he aimed up at the top of the mesa.

"Rain Cloud this is Sandman(Jones always hated how stupid the code names always were) we request distraction now." Jones said into his mike once again. Rain Cloud was the code name given to the heavy support squad that was dug in on the hill overlooking the mesa.

"Roger Sandman deploying distraction on my mark. Ten...nine...eight...seven," Rain Cloud said in Jones's ear. When he got to five Jones started to keep track with his hand as Padgett watched it very closely. "Three...two...one...mark." When he reached mark three things happened: Jones pointed at Padgett who then shouldered the shotgun aiming at the top of the mesa and Rain Cloud fired a dummy round that exploded in the sky without light but plenty of sound. When Padgett fired his shotgun the sound of the dummy round drowned it out. The dummy round sounded less like a explosion but more like thunder so the Covenant didn't think anything off it since it like to rain here a lot. The grappling hook left the end of the shotgun and taking the rope with it drove itself into the top of the mesa. Jones tugged on the rope a few times then pulled himself off the ground to really test the rope's hold.

"Well?" Padgett asked.

"Very good," Jones said slapping Padgett on the shoulder. "Ok I'll go first when I get half way up the next person goes. I don't want any more than two people on rope at any time. Hell you're last I don't want you carrying your LMG tie it to the end of the rope and we'll pull it up when we all get up there." Then slugging his rifle across his back and clipping his belt to the rope he began to climb the rope. It took Jones two minutes to reach the top and he was breathing hard when he hauled himself over the top. He quickly composed himself as he noticed the fox hole. The enemy camp was still 50 yards away but the fox hole was only three feet away. The Covenant were getting paranoid. Fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me, fool me a third time shame on both of us Jones thought with a mental shrug. Jones crawled towards the hole placing the knife in his mouth again. Jones forgot that he didn't clean the knife and gagged on the Grunt blood. Spitting the blue paste out Jones made it to the fox hole and looked in. There was a Grunt in this hole as well with his scanner but unlike the others he was awake. He looked up at Jones as Jones stuck his knife in his throat. That taken care of Jones looked behind him to see everyone had made it up and Hall and Padgett were pulling the LMG up using the rope.

"We're all up," Von whispered into his radio so Jones could hear.

Jones nodded and crouch walked over to them just as they got the LMG up.

"Padgett," Jones ordered pointing at the marine. "Get the rings in the ground and hook up the other two ropes."

"Got it," Padgett said taking his assault pack off and rummaging through it.

"That rest of you fallow me and be very quit," Jones said pointing at the base only 50 yards away. "Padgett." Jones turned to face the marine when he saw that he was holding a stake with a clip ring on top in his left hand and in his right he held his combat knife by the blade. Rising the knife above head meaning to use it as a hammer to drive the ring into the ground. Jones reached out and grabbed his wrist before he could bring it down.

"What?" Padgett demanded.

"First you screw them into the ground that's why their threaded," Jones explained. "Second you think metal striking metal might give us away?"

"Right," Padgett said putting the knife away. Even at night Jones could see his checks flush with embarrassment.

"Don't sweat it," Jones said reassure him with a hand on his shoulder. "Meet up with us when you're done." Jones then lay on his stomach and started to crawl towards the Covenant base with the rest of the marines behind him. When they were only ten yards out Jones could see the barracks that was their objective and a Shade manned by an alert Grunt. Jones came to a halt and threw his arms out to his side catching the two marines right next to him causing them to stop as well. The rest of the marines stopped seeing the three that had stopped.

"What is it?" Padgett asked crawling next to Jones after he finished with the rings and rope.

"Shade emplacement," Jones said pointing at it.

"No problem," Padgett said crawling forward shotgun in hand. Jones rolled his eyes and grabbed his leg pulling him back.

"We have to do it quietly," Jones explained getting tired of explaining things to the well meaning marine. "We don't have silenced weapons and if you tried to knife him he would see you and all hell would break loose."

"Right," Padgett said finely catching on. Jones rolled his eyes again and keyed his radio.

"Rain Cloud this is Sandman," Jones said into his helmet mike. "Enemy gun emplacement at our 12 o'clock confirm you see it."

On the hill overlooking the mesa the heavy weapons squad was well dug in. They had dug fox holes for each of them plus two mortar pits and three fighting pits. They had even gone so far as to use simulated mortar rounds that on their eye piece showed where they would land so they could quickly target anything in the base. One of the snipers

heard Jones's radio transmission and moves so he could see Jones's teams' FOF tags in the pale green of his night vision scope. He then moved the cross hairs a little in front of them to locate the Shade and the Grunt sitting behind the controls. He zoomed in on the Grunt's head and keyed his radio.

"Roger Sandman what do you want done?" He said into the mike not taking his eye off the Grunt.

"Remove it quietly," Was the whisper he heard in his ear.

"With pleasure," the sniper said a small smile touching his lips. This is what he lived for picking off a target that doesn't even know you exist. The sniper took a deep breath in and then slowly exhaled pulling the trigger on the pause between the breath out and the next one in. The rifle kicked against his shoulder the barrel's silencer reducing the sound to nothing but a high pitched snap. The sniper was rewarded with the Grunt's head snapping to side and then his whole body slumping down in the seat of the Shade.

"Nice shot," The voice in his ear told him. The sniper pleased with himself took out his knife and added another tick mark to the growing number on the stock of his rifle.

Jones waved his arm and the marines started crawling forward again moving past the Shade. When they were only 15 feet from the barracks Jones stopped them again.

"Alright," Jones whispered to his team picking up a stick and drawing in the dirt. "We'll set up a 'L' ambush in front of their barracks. Hall take your LMG and set it up over there by the those creates. You'll be the short side of the 'L' Padgett you go with him and blast anything that gets to close. The rest of us will form the long leg of the 'L' facing the barracks. That way when they come out they'll be hit from the front and there left side and we won't have to worry about shooting each other. Now before we do that we'll set up the Claymores here and then here." Jones drew two lines in the dirt one in front of the 'L' he had made and the other behind the 'L'.

"Why are we putting them behind us?" Holloway asked.

"I got two sets of detonators," Jones said. "The first line well shake them up and when we pull back and get behind the second line it will cover our retreat. Any other questions?" Jones looked around the group and seeing no one else speaking up he ordered them to their positions. A few moments later everyone was in position and the Claymores were set and armed. The only regret the Jones had was that the only cover, he and the other marines on the long leg of the 'L', got was a slight rise they were laying on. Hall and Padgett had a small barricade they made out of the create they were behind but other than that they were in the open. Well if this mission goes perfectly they wouldn't need to fire a shot. Jones looked at his mission clock it was 2230 Stevenson's team should already be in base and completing their part.

Stevenson's team's mission role was to sneak into the base via the opposite side of Jones's team hack into the Covenant's battle network to find their other base locations then plant time charges on the Shade emplacements, Banshees, and any other AA defense. In theory the marines would be long gone by the time the charges went off clearing

the way for a air strike that would level the base. If things did go to shit they would have the heavy weapons team light them up with mortars, sniper and rocket fire. Then Jones's team would get most of the ones sleeping in the barracks and draw attention from Stevenson.

Near the Covenant's com center, along with the body of a dead Jackal, Lance Corporal Stiff jumped a laptop into the main data wire on the outside of the building.

"One moment please," the AI on the screen said as he hacked into the Covenant's battle net. A full five minutes pasted and the only thing the ODST could do was tap his foot.

"You almost time?" he asked the screen.

"Indeed I am," the AI said appearing on the screen again. "I have all the locations of their remaining installations. I have saved them to this deceive and sent them to central command."

"Awesome," the trooper said before he keyed his radio. "Sergeant we're all good here."

"Excellent," came his reply via radio. "Come back to the ledge."

"Will do," Stiff said as he packed up the laptop and jogged towards Stevenson and his team's extraction point. Stevenson keyed his radio again.

"How are we doing?" Stevenson asked into his radio.

"Planting the last charge now," a trooper said. "Heading back to you now." Stevenson couldn't be happier everything had gone as planed and soon they would be long gone and this place would be leveled.

But it wasn't meant to be. Attached to one of the Banshees that was parked very closely to 29 others was a bad charged. Well to say the charge is good but the timer was bad. It wasn't meant to go off for another 20 minutes but instead went off then blowing the Banshee to hell the five around it also going up. The chain reaction catching the rest of them sending a fire ball high into the night sky.

"Shit!" Was all Stevenson said before he hit the remote detonator that set the rest of the charges off then. "Rolling Thunder this is Jack Knife the party's started we need you in the air now!" Stevenson shouted into his radio talking to the Pelican pilots.

"Roger," one of them said back. "In the air now ETA 20 minutes."

"Jack Knife to Rain Cloud!" Stevenson still shouting. "Hit them now and hit 'em hard!"

On the other side of the base Jones's team was very board as the only thing they could do was move their arms and legs slightly else give themselves away. Jones was in the middle of a yawn when the charge went off causing Jones to bite down hard just missing his tongue. A second later the rest of the charges went lighting up the night in a

flare of orange and red. A alarm began to wail and floodlighting snapped on.

"HOLD FIRE!" Jones screamed into his radio. "Wait for them to come out and pick your targets!" A second later a very surprised, confused, and naked Elite rushed out of a barracks and was hit from two sides and cut down instantly. Mortar rounds and rockets had started to land on the base from the hill. More Covenant troops started to trickle out of the barracks and were quickly cut down by Jones's team. Soon more started to show up and were starting to take cover against the humans as they couldn't keep up with the number of Covenant troops. Jones set off the first line of Claymores then killing the ones outside the barracks and wounding the ones near the doors. They stayed in there then their shots becoming wild going over the humans' heads.

"Hold fire!" Jones shouted again. "Wait for them to come out! They can't get us and we can't get them when they're in there."

"Sandman!" Stevenson's voice shouted in Jones ear.

"What?!" Jones demanded as he empty his magazine into a half dressed Elite.

"Rolling Thunder is 11 minutes out! Get out of here and to the tree line!" Stevenson ordered.

"Roger!" Jones said into his radio then looking at Hall and Padgett. "Get over here we'll cover you!" Jones ordered. Padgett ran towards Jones's line but Hall stopped to try and pick up the LMG. "Just fucking leave it!" Jones shouted at him. It was too late as an Elite peeked out and fired a burst of blue fire into Hall's face. Hall was thrown backwards behind the create and the Elite ducked back inside. Jones threw a grenade after the Elite and watched as his bloody limbs flew out the door. Padgett seeing his friend go down stopped and turned around to go get him.

"Hang on I'm coming!" He shouted as he blindly fired his shotgun at a Jackal who ducked behind his shield.

"Forget him he's dead!" Jones shouted as he reloaded to fire at the Jackal also. Padgett ran out of shells before he could finish however and the Jackal fired a over charged bolt of green plasma into Padgett's chest. He fell to the ground where his cloths started to burn. "Goddamn it!" Jones cursed as he fired half his magazine into the Jackal. More than the target needed but less then he thought he deserved. The Covenant had felt the swing in power and they started to rush out of the barracks again firing more accurately at the humans.

"We're screwed man!" Holloway shouted and jumped up turning to runaway when a hail of needles hit him in the back turning him to red mist and bits.

"EVERYONE STAY DOWN!" Jones ordered screaming at the top of his lungs. "JUST STAY THE FUCK DOWN!" He keyed his radio. "Rain Cloud this is Sandman we need immediately fire support at our 12 o'clock!" 10 seconds later two rockets impacted in front of them sending up a cloud of smoke, fire, and body parts. Mortar rounds started to land

right after the rockets.

"Listen everyone!" Jones shouted over the battle. "Everyone throw your smoke grenade and then two frag grenades! It doesn't matter where as long as it is in front of you! Then run back to the ropes slid down and sprint for the tree line! Don't want for me just get to the fucking tree line!" Then doing as he said threw his smoke grenade fallowed by his frag grenades. Jones made sure his was the last one to get up then under cover of smoke and mortars he ran back to the three ropes that were set up. Jones watched as last marine Von slid down and ran for the tree line 120 yards away. The Covenant were already advancing on Jones and would soon have easy shots on the rest of his team. Taking a deep breath Jones turned and fired on the advancing Covenant finishing the last of his assault rifle ammo and yanking out his pistol to resume firing. Jones looked over the edge and saw Von had almost made it to the tree line. Jones snapped the rope to his belt and jumped off triggering the second line of Claymores as he did so. The closest Covenant were either dead or burning. When Jones hit the ground he sprinted for the tree line he was only 20 yards away when he felt the plasma bolt clip his side. He crashed to the ground and waited for the second one that would finish him off.

Only a mile out the nine Pelicans in wedge formation closed on the Covenant base at full speed. The one in the lead flipped on his target computer and everything that it considered hostile was marked by a red diamond, friendly by green ones. The red heavily outweighed the green.

"That's what we call a target rich environment," the pilot said to his co-pilot.

"Fuck yeah," the co-pilot agreed. The pilot keyed his radio.

"This is Rolling Thunder we are coming in fast and loud keep your head down." the pilot ordered. The pilot pulled the trigger firing both rockets and the chain gun. The rest of the Pelicans opened up as well the base blossoming with fire. When the Pelicans were over the base they dropped dumb bombs from their clamps used for vehicles. Later the weapons pods would be designed from those bombs. What was left of the base was crushed from the bombs.

Jones looked up and saw the Pelicans circle back around for a second pass at the base. He slowly got to his feet and holding his side limped into the tree line. He meet with the rest of his team and they helped him back to the LZ where they were picked up and taken back to their base.

Present day Major Fox's office aboard **_Silent Dawn**_**.**

"So how did you feel losing three men your first command?" Fox asked breaking into Jones's thoughts.

"I would be lying if I said I didn't care," Sergeant Jones said. "but I would also be lying if I said I was truly broken up. The only team untouched was the heavy squad. I only lost three where Stevenson lost 10 of his 16 and of those six all of them were wounded somehow Including himself. Two of them died because they didn't listen so I really have no pity for them."

"I see," Fox said. "What happened after that?"

"We mopped up the rest of the Covenant's bases with combined ground and air assaults," Jones said crossing his arms.

"Now I want to talk about your first encounter with the flood," Fox said.

"Hang on a second why the hell do you have to know all this shit?" Jones demanded.

"As you know," Fox started placing his right foot on his left knee. "Our war is over. The Elites however still have Brute tribes to kill. They helped us so now we are repaying the favor however this is an all volunteer force. We have to see if you really want to sever or just have a score to settle."

"Fine," Jones said cooling. "What do you want to know?"

"I want to talk about the mission you ran into the flood." Fox said.

"The one to retrieve the index with commander Keyes?" Jones asked.

"That's the one," Fox said turning the page on his note book.

"Alright," Jones said.

8. Lost Keys

Jones sat in the chair and looked at Fox who only stared back waiting. Jones didn't really know where to begin Fox guessed this and decided to help.

"So after your tour on Sole 7 where did you go?" He asked.

"Where ever they needed me," Jones said smugly.

"How did you take the news of Reach?" Was Fox's next question. "What went through your head?"

"We're fucking screwed," Jones said bluntly. "I knew we were screwed to begin with but now I felt like we didn't have a chance anymore."

"That didn't stop you from fighting?" Fox asked leaning closer.

"No," Jones said thinking about his answer for a little bit. "I guess I thought I would die but wasn't going to make it easy on them."

"Your gamble paid off and you got enough leave points with your volunteer missions to get rotated back to Earth," Fox said looking at a PDA that currently displayed Jones's service record. "Hell you had enough for a draftee to be discharged but you stayed in why?"

"Like I said," Jones explained still with crossed arms. "I felt like we were screwed and would have rather gone down fighting."

"So when you got back to Earth what happened?" Fox asked but he already knew. Jones rolled his eyes not liking to be dragged along like this.

"I was stationed aboard Cairo Station," Jones said. "It was very boring until the Covenant showed up. They boarded the station and I was back in the fight."

"How did you end up aboard In Amber Clad?" Fox asked referring to Commander Keyes's ship.

"I was defending some corridor when a Sergeant Major told me to come with him," Jones explained as his eyes started to glaze over as he remember. "He outranked the fuck out of me so I did as instructed and boarded the ship."

"Sergeant Major Johnson wasn't it?" Fox asked razing an eyebrow.

"The one and only," Jones said.

"Did you fight on Earth?" Fox asked then.

"No," Jones said the disappointment clear in his voice. "I wasn't on their roster so I stood around mainly because they didn't know I was there. It was chaos when they attacked."

"If that was so how did you end up on the ring?" Fox asked as he consulted his PDA. "The Spartan and a platoon of ODST were sent after the Prophet. They didn't have a record of you. You didn't have to fight." A small smirk came to Jones's face.

"They needed volunteers," Jones said.

** Aboard a Pelican drop ship bearing unknown, distention
****Installation 05**** Library. Three months ago.**

Jones sat in the drop ship and drummed his fingers on his BR55(Battle Rifle) as he thought about the weapon. He just couldn't wrap his head around the fact they had gotten rid of a fully automatic assault rifle that used 60 round magazines and replaced it with a rifle that only fired in 3 round bursts with only a 36 round magazine. Sure it was hell of a lot more accrete and the rounds had more punch but still the lack of ammo and fire rate concerned him. Also what concerned him was the amount of ammo they had given him. He had 20 magazines in his ammo vest for a total of 720 rounds plus a assault pack on his back with 10 more magazines and a can of lose ammo. Even their close combat specialist(a official way to say guy with a shotgun) was loaded down with ammo. He wore three belts of shells: one around his waist, one from his right shoulder to his left hip and one from left shoulder to right hip so they crossed in the middle of his chest and back. It looked very cool Jones had to admit but each belt held 60 shells for a grand total of 180 shells. What did they expect us to fight? Jones thought.

"You alright corporal?" Johnson asked interrupting Jones's thoughts.

"Of course Sergeant Major," Jones said looking up.

"You just looked miles away there," Sergeant Major Johnson said explaining himself. "You need to be focused on the mission."

"Always am Sergeant Major," Jones said forcing himself to stop drumming his fingers. Johnson nodded satisfied. Jones's mind began to wonder again but he forced himself to look straight ahead to make it seem like he wasn't day dreaming. Plus they only gave us shatter rounds Jones thought. Perfect for anti-personal work but lack the punch to pierce armor. A usual load out had magazines loaded with a three to one ratio of armor pricing to shatter rounds. Everything about this mission made him uneasy and it hadn't even truly begun yet.

"Alright people," Sergeant Johnson said speaking loud enough so everyone could hear. "Your only mission objective is to protect the commander so she can complete her mission. Does everyone understand?"

"Yes sergeant major!" the marines shouted together. Jones looked as Johnson puffed on his cigar and touched the pocket he kept his own cigarettes in. He wanted nothing more than a cigarette but rank had its privileges and he wasn't high enough up. There was a dull thump and Jones was jolted in his seat as the Pelican touched down.

"Alright go! GO! GO!" Johnson ordered as the marines charged down the ramp and formed a semicircle around the ramp. Jones flipped the safety off his rifle as he brought it to his shoulder. Jones swept the area directly in front of him before up and taking cover against a wall. He waved his hand forward and two other marines moved up with him.

"Keep it tight," Jones said as he lead them into the installation. The rest of the marines including Sergeant Major Johnson and Commander Keyes were right behind them. They formed two columns with Johnson and Keyes in the middle as they moved deeper into complex. Jones clicked on the light attached to his rifle. The light casted harsh shadows as he swept it from corner to corner. Despite the fact that he couldn't see anything and his motion tracker could only read the other marines he still felt like something was watching them.

Jones never gave to much thought to the new motion trackers one they had a short range and two they couldn't tell the different between enemies and friendlys. Unlike the kind that the Spartans got his only had a range of five feet making it useless because if he didn't see them by then he was already dead. Second it would show FOF tags as green dots but anything else would just be yellow dots. Covenant, rats and marines that lost or forgot their helmet.

They were doing ok having made it across a deep chasm via a very large moving platform. Jones was starting to think he was finely on a cake walk when his light moved over something that also moved. Jones froze in place and snapped his rifle to his shoulder as he looked at the corner on the wall where he saw the movement. It was gone whatever he saw and his motion tracker read clear but he knew what he saw. The marine that was walking behind Jones in the column bumped

into Jones.

"What the hell?" He demanded a little angry.

"Shhhh," Jones said but not taking his eyes off the corner where his ring of white light shown. Sergeant Johnson had moved behind Jones after he had stopped the group.

"What is it corporal?" he asked standing behind Jones also looking where Jones was looking. Not even the voice of the intimidating Johnson caused Jones to look away.

"Thought I saw something sergeant major," Jones explained risking to point with his left hand leaving his right on the rifle's pistol grip. "There."

"What was it?" Johnson asked rising his own rifle to his shoulder.

"I don't know," Jones admitted. "It kind of looked like a squid." Jones couldn't see it but Johnson's eyes widened.

"Ok listen this is what I want you to do," Johnson began but he never got to finish because the infectious form jumped from the shadows and landed on the marine that had bumped into Jones. The Flood form had already cut a slit into the marine's neck and was starting to slip inside when he reacted grabbing the thing and trying to pull it off.

"AH GET IT OFF!" He screamed as he back pedaled thrashing wildly. "SOMEBODY GET THIS FUCKING THING OFF ME!" The marine had lost his grip on the Flood and it deflated itself as it slipped into his chest cavities. The marine hunched over as his skin began to boil and change as the chemicals the Flood released flowed through him. The marine let out an inhuman wail as he broke his own back as a spasm forced him to bind over backwards. A knot of tentacles forced their way out where his left arm was and where it now used to be. Johnson didn't let it go on any further for he emptied his magazine into the former marine.

"Get ready!" Johnson shouted. "Form a circle and get ready." The Flood poured from everywhere then, infectious forms and combat forms made from Brutes and Elites. Jones back pedaled and joined the rest of the marines in a circle in the middle of the large corridor. Like most marines Jones had received the briefings on the Flood. When the Master Chief had returned he had briefed the higher ups about the Flood and they had told the generals and admirals who in turn told the colonels and captains in till it trickled down to the lower enlisted. They had described their forms and attacks. How to best kill them and what to do if overwhelmed. Of course as the information went down the ranks things were left out. For instance Jones knew there were Flood on the Halo ring the Spartan had destroyed but he didn't know that they were built to house and study the Flood.

Jones emptied his magazine into a charging form and watched in horror as it still kept coming at him. Jones yanked back on the bolt and locked it back as he dropped the empty magazine and shoved a full one in place of the empty one. Jones slapped the bolt's knob down and it snapped forward chambering a round and resetting the ammo counter from 0 to 36. Jones fired three more times(a total of nine rounds)

finally dropping the grotesque thing. The marines were holding their own but they were also getting picked off as they reloaded.

"Let's move columns of two!" Johnson ordered. The marines did as instructed and formed two columns running down the corridor. In between the two columns were Sergeant Johnson, Commander Keyes, the close combat specialist, and two marines armed with the still fully automatic M7 submachine gun. Jones and the rest of the marines armed with 'Battle Rifles' ran on either side. Jones's heart raced as he tried to focus on the incoming Flood forms. They were doing alright but they were still losing marines as they couldn't keep up with the swam. Jones lost count of his ammo and when his hand dropped to his vest to pull a new magazine free he found only empty pockets.

"Oh shit," he said as he slipped his assault pack from his back. He opened it and pulled a magazine out when the combat form jump on his back. They both fell to the ground causing Jones to drop his rifle and it skidded across the floor. Jones rolled over as he yanked his pistol free from its holster. Jones fired at the former Brute before it could get up but the slide locked back on an empty magazine before he could finish the creature. Jones dropped the empty magazine as he used his legs to scoot himself across the floor away from the Flood form. The marine formation still continued to run as the close combat specialist fired his shotgun into the form attack Jones killing it.

"Come one man lets go," he said as he held out his hand to help Jones up as the rest of the marines ran on. As Jones reached up to take it he saw that the belt around his waist was completely empty as well as the one on his right shoulder.

"We have to catch up," Jones said as he got to his feet and picked up his rifle. Jones dumped his assault pack on the ground and placed the magazines in his vest taking advantage of the Flood chasseing the bulk of the fleeing marines. The two marines ran to catch up with the rest of the group when another group of Flood combat forms dropped from above. The combat specialist fired his shotgun till it was dry killing four of them but as he reloaded one of them ran up from behind and clubbed him in the back off the head. Jones watched as his head spun completely around as he fell to the ground. Jones brought his rifle around but the Flood form tackled Jones knocking them both to the ground. Jones fired the last three rounds into the combat form as he locked the bolt back to reload. The combat form used one of its tentacles as a whip and cracked it across Jones's left leg.

"GODDAMN IT!" Jones screamed as he felt and heard something snap. Jones slammed the new magazine in and fired most of it into the combat form killing it. Jones used the rest of it to kill the infectious forms that crawled towards him. Jones reloaded and looked behind him to see two more combat forms coming up from behind. "Not like this." Jones whimpered as he used his one good leg and left arm to push and pull himself towards a corner while his right arm fired the battle rifle at the two combat forms. With his back against the wall he used both hands to drop the advancing combat forms depleting the rest of his rifle ammo. He freed his pistol from its holster again and laid it on his right thigh. Jones pulled his self med kit off his belt and ripped it open. He found the moldable splint and bandage roll as he pulled out his combat knife. Sticking the knife's grip into his mouth and biting down hard he formed the splint to his leg. Before he could wrap it with the bandage roll more infectious

forms crawled from the shadows. Jones snatched up his pistol and popped the little freaks. Picking up the bandage roll again Jones started to wrap his leg when his radio squawked to life.

"All able marines we need you to regroup with the commander!" Johnson's voice screamed in his ear. Jones sped up his rate when he reached the break in his leg. Jones let out a scream muffled by the knife's grip before the pain caused him to pass out.

It was unknown to Jones or to anyone for that matter, including the impressive Major Fox, that it was The Arbiter that saved Jones's life. When The Arbiter charged through the Flood that would have taken Jones went after the Elite. The Arbiter being who he was killed them all at least the ones that would have finished off Jones.

Jones was walking on a beach. He couldn't remember how he got there but he could feel the sun on his back and could smell the salty sea air. As he walked along the beach he heard a seagull as it dove into the water. He went to take off his combat boots when he realized he was wearing combat boots. He was wearing a combat uniform in fact and he couldn't remember why. He seemed to remember it had something to do with a fight. Then he remember that he was a marine in the UNSC, but he still couldn't remember how he got to this beach. He didn't really care anymore it was peaceful and the sun felt pleasant. Jones sat down on the sand and gazed up at the sky. He was about ready to lay completely back when the sun seemed to get brighter. He closed his eyes tight but the light bled through as he squeezed his eyes even tighter. The smell of salt grew in intensity in till it stung his nose. He clamped his hand over his nose but the smell only got stronger. The inside of his nose was burning and the light in his eyes was blinding him.

Jones threw opened his eyes as the medic waved the smelling salt tube under his nose as he shined a small light into his eyes. Jones reached for his pistol thinking him a Flood from when the medic placed a hand on Jones's shoulder.

"Wow just take it easy," He said as he removed the light and smelling salt. "You're alright now." Jones looked down to see the medic had finished splinting his leg and must of giving him a pain killer for he felt no pain. After contact had been lost with Commander Keyes and Sergeant Major Johnson a rescue team was sent after them. The medic that was treating Jones was part of that team.

"The commander?" Jones asked his voice sounding miles away to himself. The medic look to the side and sighed heavily.

"We have reason to believe that Commander Keyes and Sergeant Johnson have been captured by the Covenant," The medic explained. Jones passed out again at the news.

Present day Major Fox's office aboard **_Silent Dawn**_**.
**

"They sent me back to Earth to be treated for the broken leg and for possible Flood infection," Jones explained to Fox.

"I see," Fox said. "How did you feel after?"

"Like I failed," Jones said in a heavy voice. "I had one job to do:

protect the commander and I failed."

"What if I told you that it was them being captured that stopped the second Halo ring from firing," Fox explained "At least it helped?"

"What if I told you a marine you tried to help still went crazy and killed a whole bunch of other marines? But it's ok because all the marines he killed were really Covenant spies?" Jones shot back harshly.

"I see your point," Fox said writing on his pad of paper. "After that mission they promoted you to sergeant?"

"Yeah after I got out of the hospital," Jones said cooling again.

"Did you feel you earned it?" Fox asked next.

"Not really felt more like they needed to fill a hole in their ranks the war caused." Jones said.

"Good now we just have one last thing to discuss," Fox said looking at Jones's file again.

"What's that?" Jones asked rolling his eyes.

"How you meet the Spartan and the mission you went on with him," Fox explained. "The mission where you meet Hamanee again."

9. Reunion

_ Warning adult content read at your own discretion._

****A month ago on Earth outside**** the loading dock of a warehouse.****

After Jones had made a full recover they sent down to Earth but instead of the fronts lines they put him in charge of a squad outside a warehouse's loading dock. The city he was in was under siege from the Covenant but he was stuck checking idea for factory workers. Even when marine ground forces and the Spartan launched an assault on some Covenant anti air batteries the only thing Jones got to shoot was a few Grunts and a Brute that had gotten lost. During the assault he had radioed command and asked for an update but they still had him hold his position. Even when the flood ship crashed on Earth and the cries for help poured from Jones's radio his orders remained the same hold the warehouse checkpoint.

The check point had come under attack minutes after the flood ship hit the ground. With plenty of bodies left after the assault on the covenant triple A positions the flood sent wave after wave at the check point. Soon his squad was almost completely overran with only Jones and Jason left. They were pushed back till they reached the corner were their weapons were stored. Jones and Jason fired at the income wave of freaks trying to keep them back to little effect. That's when Jones threw a grenade which blew in the middle of the group turning most into flying limbs and scattering the rest. Jones and Jason quickly gunned down the survivors.

The two marines then walked out to the middle of a descending ramp meant for trucks to unload their cargo. They couldn't find their squad mate's bodies for the flood had already turned them into freaks and they had unknowingly killed them. That's when the little infectious ones swarmed at them dropping from the roof. One of them jumped onto Jason's face and latched on. Jason panicked pulled his pistol to shoot it off and shot himself in the face missing the parasite. As Jason's body fell the thing opened his mouth, deflated itself and slid down Jason's throat. It then used a claw to cut a slit in Jason's stomach which it used to crawl into Jason's chest cavity relishing chemicals as it did so. Its tentacles warped around Jason's spine and was in the middle of turning Jason into a combat form when Jones shot him. Jones backpedaled firing at the pods. Jones had almost popped them all when a group of combat forms jumped over a fence. Jones reloaded and fired at them as they landed. Jones knew he was done when he saw a green shape round the corner and fire at the things. The Spartan killed the things and walked over to Jones.

"Stay behind me." He said in a deep voice. Jones did as instructed and followed the Spartan through the ware house letting him do most of the work. Jones lent a hand whenever he could. They then reached the crashed flood ship. The Spartan told him to wait outside. What felt like hours were only minutes when the Spartan returned and called for dust off. Here he was again half way across the galaxy aboard the Forward onto dawn. Jones was due to meet two ONI officers at 0700 to discuss the upcoming mission. At 0645 he stopped outside of room 4A and leaned against the wall. He tried to calm his nerves rubbing the left side of his face thoughtfully. Right when his watch clicked from 0659 to 0700 he walked into the room. He took the sight in quickly two ONI officer sat behind a table, one was a first lieutenant the other was a coronal. In the middle of them was the Spartan. In front of the table was a single chair. Jones snapped to attention and saluted.

"Staff Sergeant Allen Jones reporting as ordered sir." Jones said looking straight forward.

"At ease sergeant," the lieutenant said "Please take a seat."

"Thank you, sir." Jones said as he sat in the chair bolt upright.

"As you know we are launching a joint assault on the Covenant within a few hours." The lieutenant said "The assault will be led by the Master Chief. We are to screen marines who will be under the Master Chief's command, he recommended you after running into you on Earth during the flood attack."

"We are concerned with one thing however." The colonel said opening a file on a computer.

"What sir?" Jones asked a small bead of sweat running down his back.

"You were on a top secret mission to capture a high ranking enemy officer under the command of Lieutenant Jenkins correct?" the colonel asked reading the file.

"That is correct sir," Jones said sweat starting to flow now.

"And you were awarded a silver star were you not?" the colonel asked looking Jones in the eyes.

"Yes sir I was." Jones said wanting nothing more than to disappear.

"You have never worn it, why?" the colonel asked "are you ashamed of it?"

"No sir," Jones said thinking fast "that was the last mission I was on with Private Mendez while he was alive."

"I see," the colonel said looking over the file again.

"Following that mission you willingly went on every extremely hazarders mission you could find." The lieutenant said "Were you or are you trying to kill yourself."

"Of course not sir," Jones said trying not to break eye contact "I simple wanted to do my part."

"You even went on a mission to retrieve a package on the second Halo ring where your squad suffered almost 100% casualties and Sergeant Major Johnson and commander Miranda Keyes were captured. That was you first encounter with the flood correct?"

"That is correct sir," Jones said. Jones was getting tired of this song and dance. Every superior asking him if he was suicidal he had been trying to kill himself yes but that as beside the point.

"Please withdraw as we decide," the colonel said waving his hand towards the door.

"Of course, sir." Jones said standing. He then did an about face and marched out. Jones left the room and marched to the nearest head. Jones was shaking all over, he was sure they were going to find out about the mission where he was forced to commit that horrible act. Jones splashed water on his face to wash off the sweat and to clear his head. He then reminded himself that he was the only living member of the mission except Raptor two, they were both still alive but they didn't know. Jones got a drink of water from the sink and walked back to room 4A. He waited for about a minute before they call him back in. Jones came to attention and saluted.

"At ease." The lieutenant said. Jones placed his hand behind his back. "You will be in the second wave after the Master Chief neutralizes the first tower the squad you will command will be dropped in as reinforcements along with a resupply drop. You will then be under the command of the Master Chief. Do you understand staff sergeant?"

"Yes sir," Jones said looking into the face plate of the Spartan.

"Do you have any questions?" the lieutenant asked eyeing Jones.

"No sir." Jones said looking forward once again.

"You are dismissed." The colonel said with a wave of his hand. When Jones had left the Spartan turned to the lieutenant.

"You didn't tell him sir?" he asked.

"He doesn't need to know," the lieutenant said not looking at the Spartan "besides if they do run into each other they wouldn't even know it." Jones walked to the combat prep area and strapped on his armor. He then pulled his ammo vest over his head and pulled the straps tight. He then snapped on his combat belt and leg holster. He donned his helmet and made sure the light worked. Jones then filled his canteen and walked over to the armory window. He showed the tech behind the glass his ID who nodded and passed him his assault rifle and pistol.

They had thrown he another curve ball when they started reissuing the assault rifle. However it only had 32 round magazine (four rounds small then the 'Battle Rifle') and a reduced rate of fire. The up side was the rounds were bigger and the slower fire rate proved to be more accurate but Jones missed his MA5B. Jones slipped the pistol into its holster and slugged the rifle across his back after he made sure the safety was on. The tech then handed him ammo which Jones stuffed into every free pocket. He then stood next to a group of five other marines, the reinforcements the lieutenant had called them. Jones looked at his watch it was already 0800 the first wave caring the Master Chief was already on its way.

"All right ladies," Jones said. "time to get to the bird." The five marines stood and walked in single file to a waiting Pelican. Jones took the seat on the left side one seat away from the opening. They sat there waiting for the clearance to launch. Jones thought about the mission that fateful night. For some reason he remember painting his face black with dark green stripes going diagonally across his face. He also remember that Mendez had just put some paint in his right hand and dragged it across his face, it had looked cooler than his. This made Jones chuckle under his breath.

"Ok enemy anti air is down you are clear." A voice over the radio said. The Pelican took off and flew towards the battle. Jones looked out the back opening and could see that they were over water.

"30 seconds," the pilot said over the rear mounted speakers. Jones pulled his rifle out and held it at the low ready. The water turned to grass and burning vehicles followed by the colors of covenant dead.

"All right there should be little to no resistance," Jones said "we're here to drop off the goodies and guard the area. It's a cake walk gentlemen."

"10 seconds, good hunting gentlemen," the pilot said. The drop ship landed over in a valley next to a structure that went into a cliff face. The marines jumped out and formed a semicircle around the Pelican. Jones knelt rifle at the ready. The Pelican deployed four weapon pods and a mongoose. The second Pelican dropped a transport warthog. Free of their cargo the two Pelicans flew off. Jones looked around as he got to his feet; there were two burning prowlers and several ghosts around the valley. Along with two destroyed turrets.

"All right you know the drill make sure their dead and patrol the area," Jones ordered as he walked over to the body of a Brute and gave it a hard kick to the jaw. It lay still so Jones moved to the next body this one a Jackal and stomped on its chest. The Jackal slowly reached for its fallen plasma pistol when Jones kicked it away from its grasp. Jones shouldered his rifle and fired a round into its head. Jones heard more shots as a Grunt broke for cover. Jones turned around in time to see the Spartan emerge from the structure.

"Master Chief," Jones said facing the Spartan.

"Sergeant," the Spartan said in his deep voice "there has been a problem with Johnson's squad I'm heading there now and your squad is riding shotgun."

"You heard the man, mount up!" The Jones shouted. He ran to the warthog and took the seat in the back. The Spartan jumped behind the wheel as the remaining marines took their seats in the warthog and the mongoose. They drove back to the beach head while a Pelican and four hornets waited for them. Jones ran to the Pelican and took a seat near the back this time. Jones expected to see the Spartan do the same but instead he jumped into the cockpit of one of the hornets.

"Can you believe this shit sergeant," a marine said as he took the seat next to Jones "we're here we're there. I can't tell if I'm coming or going. Just give me something to shoot."

"Amen." Jones agreed "Just remember to fousce on the mission marine."

"Always am sergeant," the marine said with a smug smile on his face. The hornets took off 30 seconds later the Pelican did as well. The marines all heard the sounds of fighting but couldn't see it for they could only look directly away from it. A banshee flew past the troop compartment being chased by a Hornet. The Hornet fired its missiles which hit the Banshee center mass and it exploded in a ball of blue fire.

"That's what it's all about right there." The marine sitting next to Jones said pointing at the burning wreck as it fell from the sky.

"Aviators," Jones said to the marine. "they get all the credit." Just then a green painted phantom pulled behind the Pelican.

"Looks like we're getting some help from our alien brothers." The marine said.

"They can take point then," Jones said. They both laughed at that.

"Drop in 10," the pilot said "the LZ has got to be hot. Get ready." Jones clicked off his rifle's safety. The Pelican hovered a couple of inches off the ground. The marines ran out along the left side of a structure the Elites ran along the right. They both met in the middle in front of a door. The Spartan walked up to the door and lead the way in. The Elites moved in and along the right side the marines along the left. Jones shot a group of three grunts planting them on

their asses as wild plasma shots whizzed by. Jones turned to his right to help a fellow marine gun down a charging Brute. With the Elites and the Spartan the fight was over in 15 seconds without either the Elites or marines needing to take cover.

"Spread out and secure the area," the Spartan ordered as he boarded an elevator. Jones walked out to the middle of the room and stood next to a white clad Elite. Jones shifted his weight from foot to foot and looked from side to side unsure of what to do.

"Soooooo," Jones began meaning to speak to the Elite. "You like baseball?" After several second the Elite turned to face him.

"Are you speaking to me?" he asked in a voice deeper than the Spartan's.

"Yeah." Jones said regretting opening his mouth.

"I know not of which you speak." The Elite said.

"You know with the plates and the bats. They throw- " The structure shook suddenly cutting Jones off."What the hell!"

Flood forms suddenly poured from the elevator shaft quickly changing the dead bodies into combat forms. Jones fired his assault rifle; the Elite fired his plasma rifle. Jones started to the left and fired at a group of infectious forms popping them. Jones then turned a little to his right and popped another group turning more to his right he emptied what was left in his magazine into a reanimated Brute knocking it down.

Jones reloaded and fired at it again before it could get up. He turned right again to shoot a leaping combat form out of the air. Jones heard a roar and turned to see an infectious form wrap around the white clad Elite's throat. Jones reacted quickly reaching down and yanking the thing off. He then squeezed causing it to pop. Jones then turned to check on the Elite to see him crawling towards the door. A reanimated Brute saw the Elite and charged him. Jones stepped in front of the fallen Elite and brought the butt of his rifle to his left shoulder holding it above his head. He side stepped slightly and swept the charging combat form's left leg behind him, at the same time bringing the butt of his rifle down on the back of its head. Jones turned on his heel and emptied his magazine into the freak. Jones then bent down to grab the Elite by the back collar of his armor and pulled him to a sitting position. Jones then started dragging the wounded Elite with his left hand and firing with his right. Jones dragged him outside the building and leaned the Elite's back against a wall. He then knelt next to him.

"Let me see." Jones said as he pulled the Elite's hand away from his neck. There was a deep gash on the right side. Jones reached into a pouch and pulled out his med kit. He took out a square looking dressing and peeled the backing off. "I'm not going to lie this is going to burn." Jones pressed the dressing to the wound. The Elite began to roar as the dressing fused with his skin to stop the bleeding. Jones then took out a premeasured dose of pain killer and injected it into the Elite's leg.

"Thank you." The Elite said as he regained his composure.

"Don't worry abou-" Jones started to say rubbing the back of his head.

"No I mean it," the Elite continued. "I thought I was going to die. I am in your debt."

"Well ok." Jones said not sure what to say.

"Could I buy you a drink?" the Elite asked. "It's the least I could do."

"Sure but I think we should wait in till this is over." Jones said.

"You right we should get back to the fight." The Elite said jumping to his feet. He swayed for a bit and then fell to the ground.

"You better sit this one out," Jones said as he warped the Elite's arm around his shoulder and helped him to his feet "come on let's get you out of here." Jones helped the Elite back to the green Phantom(the Elite was much taller than Jones so he more dragged him then carried him). Jones gently put him down into an oddly shaped seat and turned around to leave when he felt the deck shift beneath his feet. He looked out in time to see the land moving away from him before the side hatches closed. "Hey I have to get back out there," Jones said to a Elite who walked by "you have to turn around." The Elite stopped and glared at Jones for giving him an order.

"We will do no such thing," the Elite said. "we need to get the wounded back to the ship for treatment." Jones thought about something to say, decided it would do him no good and sat on the deck.

"I don't believe this." Jones said to himself.

"Don't worry," the white clad Elite said his mandibles twisting into a grin. "We're not going to hurt you. We're on the same side now." Jones nodded but felt completely out of place. Minutes passed by and Jones could do little more than drum his finger on his assault rifle. Jones felt the ship slow down and come to a stop. He stood up and helped the Elite up once again. The side hatch opened to reveal the purple interior of the Elites' ship. Jones was one of the last ones off and he followed behind the wounded and the ones helping the wounded. They arrived at what had to be the infirmary and walked inside. Jones saw the Elites placing the wounded on the beds so he did the same. An Elite walked up to Jones and looked at him then the white clad Elite then back at Jones who smiled unsure of what to do.

"What's wrong with him?" the medical Elite demanded clearly in a hurry.

" Oh! Right he's got a deep gash on his throat," Jones explained pointing at the dressing "I managed to stop the bleeding though."

"We'll take care of him," the medical Elite reassured. "please wait outside." Jones walked outside and leaned his back against the hallway along with two other Elites.

"What's up?" Jones asked the one to his right.

"What do you mean human?" the Elite sounded annoyed.

"Sorry never mind." Jones said staring at the deck. After a little while the white clad Elite walked out and stood in front of Jones. "You're out soon." Jones said.

"Yes thank you," The Elite said "the only thing the medics needed to do was give me some blood. I am truly in your debt."

"Don't worry about it." Jones said surging his shoulders.

"How about that drink then?" The white clad Elite asked.

"Sure." Jones said. The Elite started walking down the hallway Jones right behind him. The Elite stopped at a manned check point.

"What's with the human?" A black clad Elite asked the white clad one.

"He is with me." The white clad Elite simply said.

"Alright but he has to leave his weapons with me." The black clad one said extending his hand. Jones handed over his assault rifle followed by his pistol which he handed grip first. The black clad Elite stepped aside allowing the two to pass.

"Sorry about that." The white clad Elite said.

"It's all right." Jones said not really likely the idea of leaving his weapons with someone he didn't know in a strange place. They walked down several corridors until they finely reached a door that the Elite opened. Inside were many Elites sitting around tables with glasses filled with different colored liquids. In the middle was a round counter with shelves of bottles behind it. Jones followed the Elite up to the counter. An Elite wearing something like a apron walked over to them.

"What can I get you two?" he asked eyeing Jones carefully. Jones again smiled his awkward smile he used when he didn't know what to do.

"Two of the best you have." The white clad Elite said putting something on the counter.

"One moment please." The apron wearing Elite said as he turned and started to pull bottles of shelves. He turned back around holding two glasses of a light green liquid and set them on the counter in front of Jones and the white clad Elite. He then struck a match and touched it to both glasses and lit them on fire. The flame wasn't on top of the liquid as it should have been but in the middle completely surrounded by the green liquid.

"Two liquid lights." The apron wearing Elite said picking up the object the white clad Elite set down.

"Cheers." The white clad Elite said as he drained the drink. Jones however stared at the flame burning in the middle of his drink. He picked up his glass and swirled it around a little hoping the flame

would go out, instead it grew slightly. Jones looked at the white clad Elite, who looked at him expectantly. He tilted his hand back and poured it down his throat. It burned his tongue and his throat as it went down, then it suddenly went ice cold and tasted a little of mint and lemons with just a hint of lime. Jones slammed the glass down on the counter.

"Good." Jones wheezed not being able to speak any louder.

"Ha," the white clad Elite said as he slapped him on the back. "you're the first human to ever try it. Come set and talk." The white clad Elite lead Jones to a table near a corner and sat. Jones tried to sit but the chair was not meant for a human and he kept sliding off so he half sat half stood.

"How's your neck?" Jones asked.

"It's fine," the Elite said "so what is your name?"

"Allen," Jones answered not wanting to deal with his last name.

"Allen," the Elite said rubbing the dressing on his neck. "mine is Hukan Hamanee."

"Well nice to meet you." Jones said holding out his hand. Hamanee looked at Jones's hand in till Jones slowly pulled it back.

"To think," Hamanee said. "I used to hate humans."

"Well we were enemies." Jones said.

"No I mean I really hated them," Hamanee explained "a group of your marines captured me in my own camp after killing all my troops."

"Really," Jones said as sweat started to form on his back.

"Then to add insult to injury they were lead by a female," Hamanee continued on. "They took me and held me in prison until recently when everything changed."

"So water under the bridge then?" Jones asked as sweat started to form on his forehead.

"For most yes, but there is one that did something that was unforgiveable." Hamanee said. A female Elite walked up to the table wearing a flowing dress. "This my wife." Jones couldn't bring himself to look her in the eye. He knew who Hamanee was now, he was the one that raped Jenkins. In a quest for revenge she forced him to rape the female Elite that now stood at their table. Just then two Elites walked up to the table.

" Your Excellency you're needed." One of them said.

"Please forgive me Allen I must go speak with them," Hamanee said standing up. He walked with the two Elites across the room to a group of white and gold clad Elites. Jones looked down at the floor.

"Jones, so good to see you again." The female Elites said. Jones's head shot up.

"You recognized me?" Jones said sweat flowing down his back now.

"I could never forget that face," she said gently touching Jones's scarred left side (he had received on the last mission just before Mendez was killed). "no matter how damaged it has become."

"How, but please don't," Jones said trying to find the words. "I'm sorry I never meant to or want it...you know."

"Do not fear Jones," she said her voice soothing. "My husband doesn't need to know. So tell me how you have been." She placed her claw on Jones's thigh.

"Well I-" Jones started but Hamanee returned.

"I'm sorry Allen," he said clearly in a hurry. "but you will have to stay here for quite some time. There has been some trouble with the assault and things could be dangerous so we are jumping out of the system. Dear, could you please show him to a bunkroom?"

"Of course," The female Elite said standing and pointing at Jones "this way please." Jones followed her down the purple corridors again. They stopped in front of a door after it slid opened and Jones stepped inside. There was a bed in the middle of the room with a desk next to it and that was pretty much it. Jones sat down on it, the bed was a little stiffer then his cot but it would work.

"Thank you." Jones said looking the female Elite in the eye for the first time.

"I'll be back later to tuck you in." she said with a wink. She then left and the door slid shut.

"What?" Jones said out loud. He pulled off his boots and set his vest still stuffed with ammo on the deck. He then loosened the straps on his armor and set that next to the ammo. He stood up and walked to the other side of the bunk room. A door opened to a much small room he guessed was a bathroom. He looked inside and saw what he thought was a shower. After massing with the buttons a stream of water flowed out of a hole in the ceiling. Jones felt the water with his hand, it wasn't as warm as he would like but it would do. He pulled off his uniform jacket and his undershirt. He then unzipped his pants and pulled them off as well and threw them in a pile by the door. He slipped of his underwear and placed them on top of the pile. He then stepped under the water.

Jones washed himself without any soap (for he had none) but it still felt good to get somewhat clean. He turned the water off and reached for his towel when he remembered he didn't have one. Sopping wet he pulled his underwear back. He then looked at the pile of cloths and decided he would wait in till he was dry before putting the rest of them on. He stood up and picked up his assault pack. He routed around inside in till he found a MRE. Jones ripped the top of the package and removed the package of beef stew (his favorite). Jones added water to the heat pack and placed the packet of beef stew in it. While the stew warmed up he went to the pile of his cloths and pulled his pants back on now a little dryer. Jones then picked up the packet of beef

stew and opened it steam relishing as he did so. He then used a plastic spoon to stir his meal. He then shoved spoonfuls of stew into his mouth not really tasting it. Once Jones had finished he wasn't sure what to do with the trash so he just shoved it into his pack. He heard a knock on his door and stood to answer it when it opened and Hamanee's wife walked in.

"I came to see how you were settling in," she said in her soothing voice.

"I'm doing ok," Jones said rushing to find his shirt. The female Elite grabbed Jones's right wrist and pulled him closer to her.

"You seem much too tense," she said running a claw over Jones's shaved head "you should relax." She then slowly unzipped Jones's pants. Jones pulled away gripping his pants with white knuckles.

"What are you doing?" Jones demanded.

"Oh just trying to make you feel at home," She said pulling a lace on her dress and it fell to her ankles showing Jones her undergarments and pleasant curves once again.

"I won't do it," Jones said his voice slightly wavering.

"That's adorable that you think you have a choice," The female Elite said giving Jones a hard shove to the chest causing him to fall to the ground.

"I can't," Jones pleaded. "I mean your husband."

"Do you want him to find out that it was you?" She asked as she stood over him.

"No but—" Jones said looking at the ground.

"Then this is going to happen," she said removing her undergarments "so just make peace with it." She then picked Jones up and placed him on the bed removing his pants and underwear. She gently stroked his member and it quickly stiffened. She then sat over Jones now stiff member and placed the tip inside her, she reached out and took both of Jones's hands and placed them on her hips. She then began to bounce up and down. Jones gasped, it felt better than he remembered. She was so soft but her skin was rough the conflicting combination made it feel all the more pleasurable.

She then bent over so their chests were touching, her firm breasts gently pressing on his chest, still working her hips. Jones wrapped his arms around her back as she rested her head on his shoulder. She did something with her mouth on the left side of Jones's neck. It was warm, wet and felt very good. They stayed like that in till she pulled herself back up and got off of Jones. She then laid on her back waiting, he knelt before her and entered her thrusting with full force. He then grabbed her left leg and placed it on his shoulder for leverage. Jones started to feel sweat form on his skin. She let out a soft roar and Jones felt something warm and wet on his member. Thinking he was in the clear Jones with drew his member covered in some kind of liquid. She turned with fire in her eyes.

"Don't think you're getting away that easy." She said. She then turned over and got on her hands and knees "you know what you must do now." Jones took a deep breath and gently placed his member inside her anus. Placing his hands on her hips he started to thrust. She was so tight and if it wasn't for the liquid already on his penis he was sure he would've hurt himself or her. She then eased herself back in till Jones was sitting on the bed and she was sitting on his lap. She then started to bounce up and down again. Jones felt himself getting close when she grabbed his hands again and placed them on her breasts. Jones felt it begin to build and tried to hold it back but she started to move her hips in small circles still bouncing. Jones felt himself go giving a small soft cry as he did so. He withdrew again.

"Well that was—" Jones started When she laid on her back once again.

"I'm not done with you yet," she said placing a claw on the back of his head and pulling it down so his face was just inches from her slit. "Clean it." Jones looked up at her eyes her claw still holding his head firmly in place. Her mandibles twisted into a smile, he stuck out his tongue and started to lick her as instructed. The outside was rough but the inside was soft and it tasted slightly of salt. "Use your hand too." She ordered so he took his right hand and stuck his pointer and middle finger inside of her it was still just as soft and warm. He then began to move them in and out, a while later she roared again that liquid following onto Jones's hand. She released his head and straightened back up. She then stood up and pulled her cloths back on as Jones did the same.

"That was," Jones said trying to find the words as he stared at the ground.

"See you around," she said was she walked out. Jones sat on the bed his head swimming. He lay down trying to make heads or tails of what just happened. He closed his eyes trying to sleep.

In a different part of the ship Hamanee was busy talking to the black clad Elite that had taken Jones weapons.

"If you could give these back to Jones for me your Excellency," he said holding out Jones's assault rifle and pistol.

"Jones?" Hamanee said confused. "Do you mean Allen?"

"Sure," he said pointing to a block of writing stamped to the side of the rifle. "Look it says Property of the UNSC Marine Core if found return to nearest UNSC compound. Issued to: Sergeant Jones, Allen D. ID number: 349-14-3764." Hamanee snatched the rile out of the other Elite's hands to look at it himself.

"Can't be," He whispered to himself as he read the writing again. When Hamanee was interrogated they showed him a video from a helmet cam. It was the video of the marine ravaging his wife and at the bottom of the screen was PFC Jones, Allen D. ID number: 349-14-3764. Hamanee had committed it to memory in case the need ever arose. Now it seemed it had.

"You alright Excellency?" the black clad Elite asked.

"Yes," He said surprised at his own calmness. "Thank you I return these to Jones right away." As Hamanee walked to Jones's room he became angrier with each step. His mandibles twisted in to a sneer and his pace quickened from a walk to a determined march. He stopped just outside of Jones's door and took a deep breath and composed himself.

"Allen." Hamanee said as he walked in. Jones sat bolt upright in his bed.

"What is it?" Jones asked as his vision cleared and he could forces on Hamanee.

"Get dressed," Hamanee ordered . "I have something I want to show you, kind of a reward for saving my life."

"Oh you don't have to do that," Jones said just wanting to go back to sleep.

"Oh but I must," Hamanee insisted. "quickly get dressed." Hamanee walked out of the room the door sliding shut behind him. Jones rubbed his eyes as he stood and walked over to his pile of cloths. He pulled on his still grimy uniform and body armor followed by his ammo vest. He didn't want to leave them unattended on a ship full of beings he didn't know. He then put on his helmet and wondered what the hell was so important that it couldn't wait till later. He walked out of the room to see Hamanee waiting for him leaning against the hallway.

"All right I'm ready," Jones said.

"Excellent, follow me," Hamanee said leading the way down the corridor. Jones followed him and woke himself up on the way. Jones noticed that they hadn't passed anyone else making him think that they must be asleep and only a skeleton crew was running the ship now. They arrived in front of a door that Hamanee had to enter a code to open. They both walked inside and Jones looked around to see different machines along a wall and a 10 foot ring in the floor that was slightly lower than the rest of the deck.

"So I give what is it?" Jones asked rubbing the back of his neck.

"This is the ship's gym," Hamanee explained placing his arms out to his sides.

"Really," Jones said his voice barely hiding his disappointment.

"And this is the sparring ring," Hamanee said pointing at the ring in the floor, Jones steeped into the ring joining Hamanee.

"Nice." Jones said as he felt the ring to find it made of a slightly softer material then the deck.

"So what do you think Jones?" Hamanee demanded, Jones looked at Hamanee his eyes widened.

"You called me Jones," Jones said slowly standing.

"Yes I did," Hamanee said anger entering his voice "that is your name isn't?"

"Yes it is," Jones admitting feeling it was pointless lying.

"And you took part on a mission to attack an enemy camp to capture an enemy officer?" Hamanee demanded.

"Yes." Jones said starting to sweat.

"To capture me and it was you that dishonored my wife." Hamanee said pointing a finger at Jones.

"Yes." Jones said staring at the deck.

"LOOK AT ME!" Hamanee barked. Jones snapped his head back up.

"Let's not act like you have any more honor!" Jones shouted also becoming angry.

"I don't know what you me-" Hamanee said dropping his own gaze to the deck.

"You raped Lieutenant Jenkins and left her to a pack of Grunts," Jones said pointing a finger at Hamanee. "That's why she did what she did and why she made me do something I didn't want to do. How many others have you dishonored yourself?"

"Silence!" Hamanee shouted regaining his temper. "You have taken my wife's honor now I will reclaim that honor." Hamanee said removing his helmet and placing it on the ground. Jones shifted his right foot behind him into a classic fighting stance.

Hamanee charged Jones hoping to end it quickly, however, Jones side stepped slightly and used his right to sweep Hamanee's left leg behind while hitting Hamanee in the back of his head with his right elbow(the same move he used on the Flood form minus the rifle). Hamanee fell to the ground face first and Jones quickly jumped on Hamanee's back and warped his right arm around Hamanee's neck in attempt to choke him out. Hamanee tucked his chin to prevent Jones completely cutting off his air supply. Jones tried to use his left hand to pull Hamanee's head back but the muscles in the Elite's neck were stronger then Jones's entire left arm.

Hamanee then simply stood up with Jones still clinging to him and then fell backwards crushing Jones beneath him. Jones let go of Hamanee and lay on the floor trying to catch his breath for it was forced out of his lungs. Hamanee got to his feet and grabbed Jones by the throat raising him above the floor, Hamanee smiled as Jones struggled to breathe. Jones grabbed Hamanee's wrist with both hands and used his core muscles to warp his feet around Hamanee's neck, Jones's body now parallel to Hamanee's arm. Jones used all his strength to push on Hamanee's neck with his feet while pulling with his arms, Hamanee became off balance and they both fell to the ground. When they did Hamanee's grip loosened and Jones quickly pulled Hamanee's claw from his throat. Jones took a deep breath and then twisted Hamanee's arm so his elbow was touching Jones's inner right thigh Hamanee's thumb facing the ceiling. Jones then placed he legs on Hamanee's chest and throat, leaning back as he did so to complete the arm-bar. Hamanee again out muscled Jones as he brought

his arm to his chest bring Jones with him.

"At least you are a worthy opponent," Hamanee sneered before he head butted Jones and threw him to the other side of the ring "for a human any way."

Hamanee stood and walked over to Jones he bent and grabbed one of Jones's legs and threw him to the other side of the ring. Hamanee walked up to Jones to do it a third time when Jones lashed out kicking Hamanee in both knees. Jones heard a snap as Hamanee roared and fell to the ground. Jones drew his combat knife as he crawled over to where Hamanee lay breathing heavily. Jones placed his left knee on to Hamanee's throat and pressed all of his weight down on it. He then held his combat knife above his head meaning to bring it down on Hamanee's chest when a thought flashed into his mind. Jones suddenly realized that this was about revenge, it was all about revenge. Jenkins had planned that whole mission just to get revenge. Hamanee's attack was to get revenge for Jenkins's revenge. Jones also knew that if he killed Hamanee now that someone that knew him would seek revenge for him and the loop would go on and on. This epiphany took only a second for Jones to process. It only took him another second to know what do to break the loop. Jones eased up on Hamanee's throat who wasted no time grabbing Jones's right arm and flipping him over on his back. Hamanee then wrapped his right arm around Jones's throat. Jones closed his eyes and waited to die, Hamanee spook his mouth right next to Jones's left ear.

"You saved my life in battle," Hamanee said, his voice was oddly calm. "even when you knew who I was you spared my life yet again. You left me with two debts, and I will repay those now." Hamanee let go of Jones who gasped for breath.

"Why?" Jones wheezed.

"Also, you did save my life." He explained as he helped Jones to his feet. Hamanee touched the dressing on his neck. Jones and Hamanee left it at that and they parted ways as they left the gym. Jones went back to his bunk room and fell asleep in his uniform. Hamanee went to his room and fell asleep next to his wife. He hadn't told Jones but his respect for the human went up tenfold. Not only had he lived so long as a warrior but he had actually bested him in unarmed combat and still speared his left.

The Elite ship jumped to Earth after the ring was lit and the Flood threat destroyed. Jones boarded a drop ship and headed to the Earth's surface again. Jones looked out a view port to see a group of marines around a wrecked Pelican with pictures pasted on them. The drop ship landed and Jones reported to battalion HQ to receive his new orders.

"Jones, where the hell have you been?" a lieutenant demanded.

"I'm sorry sir," Jones said coming to attention. "I'm here now, requesting new orders."

"The Covenant disbanded, the war is over son," the lieutenant said cheerfully. "most marines are being relieved of duty and sent home."

"Sir my home was destroyed and I have spent most of my life in the

corps," Jones hesitated but then added. "The corps is all I have left sir." The lieutenant looked at Jones thoughtfully.

"The Elites are still at war with the Brute tribes," the lieutenant explained. "we are getting a task force together to aid them. As a way of paying them back for aiding us. This is strictly a volunteer force. The sign up is over there." The lieutenant pointed at two ONI officers sitting behind a table with a piece paper on the table. A line of navy personal and marines stood waiting to write on the piece of paper. Jones almost ran to get in line ready to rejoin the fight.

10. approved

I apologize for this being such a short chapter. I meant to have it still be a part of the last chapter but it was becoming too long so I split it up.

Present day Major Fox's office aboard **_Silent Dawn.**_

"Well that's my life's story in a nut shell," Jones said looking Fox in the eye. "Anything else you would like to know: like my favorite color, oh or maybe the hand I prefer to jack off with. I normally use my right but sometimes I like to get crazy and use my left." Fox looked at Jones a little taken back but he understood his point.

"Just one last thing," Fox said putting down the note. "Do you consider yourself and Hamanee friends?"

"How many humans has his kind killed?" Jones said he himself a little taken back. "How many has he personally killed? How many has he killed as a result of his orders when he was a field marshal? Then how many of his kind have I killed?"

"I don't know," Fox said playing along.

"I guess what I'm trying to say," Jones explained narrowed eyed. "Is no I would not consider us friends."

"Then what would you consider the two of you?" Fox asked raising an eyebrow. Jones finely uncrossed his arms since he sat down as he thought about his answer.

"I don't know," Jones said as his eyes darted from side to side as he tried to find the right words. "I guess as two combatants that respect each other and are willing to fight side by side to defeat a common enemy."

"Would you being willing to die for him?" Fox asked leaning forward. "Would he die for you?" Jones stared at his boots as he thought about the question.

"I would give my life if the need arises," Jones said crossing his arms again and looking up at Fox. "I hope he feels the same."

"Alright that's that," Fox said getting to his feet and holding out his hand for Jones to shake. "We're done you can go about your

business."

"Well I would be lying if I said it was nice talking to you," Jones said as he stood and shook Fox's hand. He turned to walk out and had almost reached the door when Fox fired off his last question.

"Does Hamanee know you are the one that raped his wife?" Fox asked casually. Jones didn't even turn around or slow as he answered.

"Of course he does," Jones said just before he came to a complete and sudden stop as he realized what he had just said, this was why Fox was the best at what he did. Jones couldn't believe what he just said and how easily Fox got it out of him. The motherfucker just asked.

"Why don't you take a seat," Fox said pointing at the chair Jones just left. Jones slowly walked back to the chair and sat down without looking at Fox. Fox took his own seat and picked up his note book again.

"Look I-," Jones began not sure where to start.

"Let me," Fox said. "First of this is now all off the record. Second I have known for a long time about that and third I also know Lieutenant Jenkins pulled a gun on you. Now just start by telling me what bothers or bothered you the most about the indecent."

"I can't say it was the act itself," Jones started still not looking at Fox. "I'm fairly sure I would have been able to get over that. I just never thought I was going to enjoy it as I did it, I didn't think I was actually going to c...finish. You know?"

"Continue," Fox urged.

"During it was great," Jones admitted his face flushing. "I didn't think about the after or later. I don't know how I could, what made it worse she seemed to enjoy it as well but maybe I just tell myself that to make me feel a little better. After I...finished all I could think about was what I had done and that I was a sick twisted bastard for having enjoyed it."

"Jenkins pointed a gun at your head and forced you to do it," Fox said looking at Jones with a hint of pity in his eyes.

"Yeah I've been telling myself that for years," Jones said with a half smirk on his face for just a second. "I have also told myself that if I had refused and Jenkins did kill me Mendez would have my back and try to kill Jenkins and he would be gunned down by the three other marines. Then both of us would be dead and the three marines would do what Mendez and I wouldn't but only a lot worse. Maybe all three of them would do it individually or at the same time so I was actually doing her a favor. That went through my head just before I did it."

"That is a fair assumption," Fox remarked.

"You know that they say about assume," Jones said and laughed bitterly at his own inside joke. "I could have said no but I was a coward who didn't want to die."

"Let me get this straight," Fox said holding up both hands. "You were given a order by a commanding officer, a unlawful order yes, to so something to an enemy that had done far worse. Then when you had a gun to your head you weren't willing to lay down your life for a enemy you have spent several years fighting and killing. Does that sound about right?"

"I guess so," Jones said rubbing the back of his neck.

"Has Hamanee forgiven you?" Fox asked.

"Yes," Jones said looking up a little.

"More importantly has she forgiven you?" Fox asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

"In a way she did," Jones said finally looking up at Fox. "Yeah I would say she definitely forgave me."

"Then you should not worry about it anymore," Fox said getting to his feet again. "This time we are truly done." Jones got to his feet as well and turned to walk out once again.

"Thanks I guess," Jones said stopping at the door. "I haven't talked about that with anyone."

"And if you need to, you can come back and talk anytime," Fox said clasping Jones on the back. "Oh and you're approved for active duty so don't worry."

"Thanks again," Jones said walking out of the office. The Elite Hamanee was leaning against the wall opposite of the door with his arms crossed and one leg bent back resting on the wall.

"I heard you were up," He said as he stood up and looked at Jones. "So what was that about?" Jones turned down the corridor and started walking Hamanee fell in behind Jones.

"I had to see a shrink," Jones explained. "But I'm approved for combat."

"That is excellent news," Hamanee said. "What is a 'shrink'?"

"Oh its someone that....," Jones said trying to think of a away to word it that Hamanee would understand. "Makes sure we're fit to deal with the mental strain of combat."

"I see," Hamanee said and then in his native tongue. "Do you feel you are ready for this coming battle?"

"Just as ready as you," Jones said in the Elite's language.

"You have improved significantly," Hamanee said switching back to English. "But you still have that strange accent."

"That's because my mouth isn't even close to the same shape as yours you jackass," Jones said sharply. Hamanee chuckled.

"That was what you call a joke right?" He asked Jones.

"Yeah," Jones said chuckling himself. "I didn't think you knew how to make those."

"So what are you going to do know?" Hamanee asked Jones stopping in the middle of the corridor causing Jones to stop as well.

"I guess go back to sleep," Jones said shrugging.

"Could I buy you a drink first?" Hamanee asked Jones holding out a hand.

"You know I'm a sucker for free alcohol," Jones said walking towards the ships bar. "Let's go."

"Lead on my friend," Hamanee said in his own language. That caused Jones to stop in his tracks.

"Friend," Jones said in the Elite's language pondering the word.

"Of course," Hamanee explained. "I know we may have hated each other but you have earned my respect and I am proud to call you friend."

"Likewise," Jones said in English but he didn't know if he really meant if after all the things Hamanee had done. Hamanee may have forgiven him but he didn't know if he really forgave Hamanee. They both started walking again not speaking in till they reached the bar. Jones took a seat at a table near the back as Hamanee got the drinks.

"Remember pay with our currency!" Jones shouted at Hamanee in his language causing the other humans and the two other Elites to stare at Jones. "What?" Jones asked the room as they turned back to whatever they were doing. The Silent Dawn was a mixed ship meaning it had both humans and Elites on board. There were a few of these in the human fleet but only one ship in the Elite's fleet rumored to have humans on board. Hamanee return caring two glasses filled with a amber liquid.

"I got us...," He paused as he sat down trying to think of the word. "Whiskey I believe it is called."

"Yup that's whiskey alright," Jones said taking a sip. "How's the wife?" Hamanee downed his drink before replying.

"She is doing well," Hamanee said leaning back in his chair. "She does asked about you a lot."

"Oh," Jones said taking another drink. "Does she?"

"I believe she wishes to mate with you again," Hamanee said crossing his arms. His last comment caused Jones to spit out his drink all over the table.

"What?" Jones choked wiping his mouth.

"Do not pretend you don't know what I'm talking about," Hamanee said his tone even. "She told me what happened a month ago."

"Well don't worry it won't happen again," Jones said nervous around

Hamanee again in a long while.

"So are you saying my wife doesn't please you?" He asked leaning closer to Jones.

"No," Jones said quickly.

"Do you find her repulsive then?" He asked leaning even closer.

"No not at all she is very pretty I mean beautiful," Jones stammered. "I mean for you...not that I don't think she isn't beautiful too. I just..." Jones fell silent thinking that was the best course of action.

"Then why do you not wish to mate with her?" Hamanee asked leaning back again.

"Because she is your wife," Jones said raising his voice a little drawing more unwanted attention to himself.

"I would be insulated if you didn't," Hamanee explained. "It is not uncommon in our culture for a male to have more than one mistress. In fact most males do not marry at all, only have different mates. I can't say I have been completely faithful to her however I do care for her a lot. If mating with you makes her happy I would be happy to condone it."

"Well I," Jones began not sure what to say again.

"I would be insulted if you were to refuse her officer," Hamanee said bluntly repeating himself.

"Ok I get it," Jones said holding up his hands.

"Good," Hamanee said standing up. "I'm glad you are well enough for combat and look forward to fighting by your side again. I must take my leave now however." Hamanee turned to walk out leaving Jones to finish what drink he didn't spray on the table alone. Or so he thought as Hamanee's wife sat across from him before Hamanee had even left the bar.

"Greeting," She said in that soothing voice Jones knew all too well.

"Greetings Yuka," Jones said using her first name since it would be weird for him to call her Hamanee as well.

"Did you sleep well?" Yuka asked handing Jones a new glass filled with more whiskey.

"Not really," Jones said downing the drink his heart pounding. "Had a horrible dream." He then recently added. "You were in it."

"Was I now," She said a clear smile on his face as she folded her arms on the table leaning in a little.

"Yeah you were uhm...you had given birth to my child," Jones said his facing flushing. "It was a disturbing thing." She threw her head back and laughed at that. Jones watched her and was amazed that a creature that he once saw as ugly could seem so elegant now.

"Ah Jones," She said placing a hand on his thigh. "It is genetically imposable for us to have offspring."

"That's good I guess," Jones said feeling awkward now.

"Do you know why I love you so Jones?" She asked gently rubbing Jones's thigh.

"Uh no not really," Jones said seating bolt upright because of her last action.

"You have a kind of innocents about you that I love," She explained leaning very close to Jones. "You're also sweet and caring two things my kind is not known for."

"I see," Jones said feeling his pants tighten.

"Your also so shy," She said giving his member a playful squeeze. "And so modest."

"Thank you," Jones said giving up playing coy and give into his emotions. "I must admit I do enjoy the time we have spent together."

"And I as well," She said. "Yet I still know so little about you. Tell me how long have you been a warrior?" Jones thought about her question.

"Several years now," Jones said wishing he had more to drink as it would calm him down.

"Why did you chose to be a warrior?" She asked leaning even closer placing her other hand on Jones's arm he had on the table. Jones could help but notices her pleasant scent and felt a strange longing growing inside of him.

"I did chose I was drafted," Jones explained as he noticed how green her eyes were.

"Drafted?" She asked as he rubbed Jones's arm lightly.

"I was told I had to fight," Jones explained find that talking was becoming more difficult. "I was going to be a warrior even if I didn't want to be."

"That's horrible," She said her voice taking on that soothing tone Jones had fallen in love with. "Why don't you come with me and we can continue this conversation elsewhere."

"Ok," Jones softly said in a kind of trance as he stood up. He let her lead him out of the bar by the hand.

11. The Specter

As Yuka lead Jones down the corridor a strange thought came to him. He had slept with more aliens then he had humans. He only had one girl friend in high school before the UNSC gave him a rifle and sent him to strange planets to see horrible sights. They had only had sex

a few times before they had both finished school and he was sent to boot camp. Sure there were females in the core but to be honest they weren't the best looking(although after a few months they did same a lot better looking) plus fraternization was strictly forbidden(however with going years without leave marines got sneaky). In fact the only time Jones had gotten laid after finishing basic was when he 'meet' Yuka.

She lead Jones to a hatch that was guarded by two marines in full battle rattle , beyond lay the Elite's part of the ship and was off limits to most humans(the captain and other approved crew member had access) that included Jones. They were going to let her pass when they saw Jones behind her and one of them put their hand up.

"Hang on sergeant you're not allowed though here," He said standing up straight while his partner woke up. Jones snapped out of his daze and walked up to the marine and put his face inches from the private's.

"First off stand at pride rest when addressing a non-commissioned officer(they didn't have to on guard duty)!" Jones barked really laying it on as the marines spread their legs shoulder width apart and placed the butt of their rifles on the deck next to their right foot. Holding them by the barrel pointing them away for themselves by fully extending their arm holding the rifle while they placed their left hand in the middle of their backs.

"Sorry sergeant," The marine who had been dozing said.

"Oh so I'm a sorry sergeant now am I?" Jones asked him turning and getting into his face.

"Oh no I didn't mean that," he said quickly. "What I meant was-"

"I don't really fucking care private!" Jones continued his ass chewing. He had received many but this was the first one he was giving and he was enjoying it quite a bit. "She has a important meeting to attend and I'm here translator!"

"You can speak their language?" The private asked in a voice that was more curious then suspicious.

"Of course I can what do you think translator means?" Then turning to Yuka and speaking in her language. "Just saw something in your native tongue please." Yuka winked before speaking.

"Human warriors let us pass so I may mate with Jones," She said in her native language sounding irritated, Jones felt his face flush slightly.

"Now cross your arms and tap your foot impatiently," Jones said sounding apologetic while bowing his head and pointing at the two marines, she did as instructed.

"My body aches to feel you inside me again," She said still sounding annoyed while she looked angrily at the two marines standing behind Jones. Jones's breath hitched in his chest and he recovered himself before turning to face the marines again and switching back to English(the marines were wearing soft caps that didn't have the built in translators like the combat helmets).

"She has to get ready and we are on a tight time table," Jones said leaning in closer to the marine and whispered into his ear. "Look man I don't care one way or the other but I'm not the one you have to worry about pissing off." Jones hooked a thumb over his shoulder and the marine leaned to side to look past Jones to see he was pointing at Yuka, who still had her arms crossed and was tapping her foot. Yuka saw the marine looking at her and made the right guess by shooting him a death glare.

"Of course go right ahead Sergeant Jones," The marine said looking back at Jones obviously frightened. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Thank you private," Jones said before facing Yuka again and in her tongue. "Good job let's go." She uncrossed her arms again and stopped taping her foot.

"Thank you," She said as she walked passed them following Jones. Once out of sight of the marines Yuka took Jones's hand again and took the lead as she took him to her quarters. When they walked in Hamanee was working hard setting hunched over at the desk that was too short from him to be comfortable.

"Ah Jones," Hamanee said looking up. "I have other business I must attend to Jones could you keep my wife company?" He got up and walked out of the room before Jones could answer, Yuka locked the door behind him.

"So Jones," She said as she sat on bunk placing her hands behind her leaning back sticking her chest out. "Do you actually enjoy our time together?"

"Of course," Jones said seeing her like that causing him to stiffen.

"I see you don't lie," She said eyeing the bulge in Jones's pants. "Now come here." Jones slowly walked over to bunk as she slid down laying on her back. Jones gently removed her white dress to see she wasn't wearing undergarments.

"Naughty," Jones remarked as he moved his mouth inches from her soft slit. "My, my already wet are we?" Jones said as he used his finger to gently and lightly rub the outside of her woman hood.

"Oh Jones how cruel you can be," She half whispered half moaned. "Teasing me like this."

"Oh I don't know," He said give her slit a single lick as he moved his finger in a small slow circle. "I don't feel like I'm being cruel." He gave her a single lick again before slowly inserting his finger in her.

"I will show you how cruel I can be," She said in her soothing voice Jones knew all about.

"Well we wouldn't that now would we?" Jones whispered just before he went to work with his tongue. She gasped as she gripped the top cover with her out stretched hands. Jones eased a second finger into her and was rewarded with a moan from her.

"Yes that's it," She moaned placing a hand on the back of his head holding him down as she started to slowly rock her hips. Jones increased his intensity causing the speed of her hips to increase as well. He kept this up in till her breathing had turned to shallow quick breaths. She then gently moved his head up so they could look each other in the eyes.

"Your turn," She whispered as she pushed him back as she sat up. She removed his uniform jacket and slid his shirt up over his head. She pushed him so he was laying on his back and she was sitting up. She placed both hands open palmed on his chest and slowly slid them down in till the stopped at his belt. She loosened it and unbuttoned his pants before sliding them off and tossing them to the floor. She removed his underwear exposing his stiff member as she licked her right hand. Using that hand she slowly began to slowly stroke it her saliva compensated for her rough skin.

"Where'd you learn that?" Jones whispered staring at her hand hypnotized.

"I watched some human movies I found under a warrior's bunk," She explained increasing the speed of her hand.

"I see," Jones said still staring. He didn't know how long he could have just watched her but she stopped positioned herself over Jones. She gently slid down placing just the tip of his penis inside her before pulling it out again. She did it again and a third time before Jones spoke out.

"I was not that cruel to you," He said unable to help himself.

"Where you not?" She asked as she slid all the way down placing all of him inside of her. Jones gasped as he felt her softness once again envelope his penis. She stated to slowly circle of hips increasing the speed with each complete motion. He placed his hands on her ass and gave it a firm squeeze.

"You like the way my pussy feels?" She asked him suddenly.

"The videos?" Jones asked as he was taken a little out of the mood.

"Indeed," She said as she stared to bounce up and down Jones fell back under her spell as he watched her breasts match the rhythm of her hips.

"I like it," He breathed starting to thrust in sync with her hips. He started to feel the pressure starting to build inside of him. Before it could get to far he sat up as she laid back. He grabbed her hips as he continued to thrust now at a slight down ward angle. She wrapped her legs around his waist and crossed them behind his back drawing them even closer together.

"Yes! Yes that's it," She moaned loudly now. "I'm going...to..." She let out a loud roar before she could finish her thought and Jones felt her get even tighter as he felt something warm flow out of her.

"I love you!" He managed to get out just before he let himself go. Jones waited in till he soften again to pull out and lay on the bed. Yuka rolled over and placed her head on his chest as Jones loop his arm around her shoulders. He placed his hand on her head and gently rubbed it as she snuggled up even closer their bodies becoming one. She soon drifted off to sleep and Jones watched the steady rise and fall of her chest before he himself fell to sleep.

"I love you," he whispered again just before he drifted off. He managed to get a very restful six and a half hours of sleep before the beeping of his PDA slowly roused him from his slumber. He reached down into his pocket to pull it out and silence it but his hand just touched his bare thigh. He snapped awake then jerking up to a sitting position waking Yuka as he did so.

"What's wrong?" She asked in a voice drunk with sleep while rubbing her eyes.

"Oh nothing," Jones said softly getting up and walking over to where she had thrown his pants. He reached into its right pocket to pull out his PDA and displaced the awaiting message finely shutting it up.

To: Staff Sergeant Jones, Allen D.

_ From: Captain McKnight, James, T._

_ Sergeant Jones we have new platoon of Sangheili coming aboard at 0800. _Jones stopped reading the message to look at the clock displayed in the corner of the screen. It was 0635 he had a little over an hour to get ready.

_I need you to be in launch bay 7D to in process them as well as brief them. Sighed Captain McKnight ship's commanding officer. _He bent over and pulled his underwear back on before putting his pants back on.

"What is it?" Yuka asked more awake now and a little alarmed. "Is something wrong?"

"Oh no," Jones explained as he pulled his under shirt back on tucking it into his pants. "I just have to go in process some new recruits."

"Oh so you have to go?" She asked her voice taking on a sad tone.

"Yeah," Jones said finishing getting dressed. "Or the captain will have my ass in a sling."

"Did you really mean it?" She asked swing her legs around to place her feet on the deck.

"Mean what?" Jones asked looking at her still naked form.

"That you love me?" She asked placing her hands behind her and leaning back on them. Jones's face flushed and he dropped his gaze to the deck as he thought about his answer. He knew the answer right away(it was yes) but he didn't know if he should tell her.

"Yes," Jones said looking her in the eyes. "But I can't...I mean I don't want to get in the way of your husband. He does love you as well and I don't want to ruin that."

"I know he does," She said standing up and walked over to Jones. "And I love him, but I also love you." She bent over and gave Jones a kiss(or what passed for a kiss anyway). "Have a pleasant time." Jones now confused walked out of the bunk room and looked at his watch it told him it was 0650.

"No time for a shower," He muttered to himself. When he reached the hatch under marine guard Jones quickly came up with a plan switching his walk to a march: taking 30 inch steps and swing his arms nine(inches) to the front and six to the rear. The steady click, click, click of his heels down the corridor caused one of the marines to look in. He did a double take when he saw that Jones was human. He snapped his head back when he saw Jones's rank. Jones stormed though the hatch and didn't even slow as the marine tried to get his attention. Feeling he had reach a good distance away he stopped on his heel and did a about face eyeing the marine.

"What is it private?" Jones asked sounding irritated and putting emphasis on the last word.

"Nothing sergeant," The marine said. The guard had been changed and those two marines were not the same ones from earlier.

"Carry on," Jones said as he marched away a smug smile coming to his face once he was facing away. He switch back to a causally walk once he was around the corner. He went to the armory and retrieved his pistol belt and light combat vest. As he strapped the belt around his waist he made sure it had everything: pistol, spear magazines, handcuffs, and stun stick. He strapped on the vest before he drew his pistol and checked the chamber. He glanced at his watch again before he walked out and started to march towards the launch bay.

Since he was the only human that could read and write the Elite's language and one of the few that could speak it as well. His main job aboard the ship was to in process all incoming Elites. When he reached the bay he went to his desk that they had brought down and dumped in a corner. He sat down and logged into his computer and brought up all the forms and printed off the hard copies. Jones reached for his coffee pot to find it already full of coffee.

"I made it," A booming voice said echoing in the large space. Jones looked up to see Hamanee standing in front of his desk. His brilliant white armor was spotless and shiny clearly just polished.

"These must be your boys," Jones remarked as he looked at the coffee and could see lose coffee grounds floating in it. "You made this?" Jones asked trying very hard to keep his face neutral.

"Indeed," Hamanee said clearly proud of himself.

"The coffee filter?" Jones asked as he poured it into his mug watching the grounds flow into the cup.

"What do you speak of?" Hamanee asked confused.

"Never mind," Jones said setting the mug down having no intension of

drinking it as he stapled papers together.

"Please sample some," Hamanee encouraged. Sighing Jones picked up the mug and pressed it to his lips but before he could take a sip a loud siren started to blare letting him know the outer doors were opening.

"Sorry man looks like it's time to get to work," Jones said setting the mug back down. "It's too early for this." Jones said as the siren continued to wail. He removed his pack of cigarettes and shook one loose, then held it out so Hamanee could take one. Jones lit Hamanee's first before lighting his own and sticking it in the corner of his mouth while Hamanee puffed on his. Seemingly after an eternity the alarm stopped as the outer doors opened, the Phantom docked, and the doors closed again. Hamanee stood and stubbed out his cigarette he walked over to a shaded corner and crossed his arms. The inner doors opened and 40 Elites walked in carry an assortment of personal weapons. Jones sighed as he finished his cigarette and stood up.

"Line up in single file formation in front of the desk with your identify disk out," Jones ordered.

"Where is _our _commander human?" One of them asked clearly annoyed. Before he could answer Hamanee stepped out of shadow.

"Silence and fall in!" He shouted in his native speech. The other Elites slowly got into a line and walked up to Jones's desk. The first Elite in line was a blue armored rookie who handed Jones his ID disk. Jones placed the disk into a reader.

"For the record state your full name," Jones said his hands hovering over his key board. "And place you hand into the scanner." The scanner was box that sat on top of the desk with a slot cut into the side of it for the Elite's hand, it was given to Jones by the Elites themselves.

"Zuka Zamanee," The Elite said placing his hand in the scanner, he felt a stab of pain as it sampled his tissue and blood. On Jones's screen he could see that the name and DNA matched the ones on the ID disk.

"Sign here," Jones said turning the screen so Zamanee could see it and handing him a digital pen.

"What are you forcing me to sign human?" Zamanee demanded. Jones rubbed his temples as he explained.

"While on board this ship you are not permitted to carry any form of weapon," Jones said "This includes but is not limited to: plasma pistols, plasma rifles, needlers, carbines, beam rifles, energy swords, fuel rod cannons, and plasma grenades. This form you are signing states that you will comply with this and are turning over all personal weapons to me at which time they will be kept in the ship's armory. There they will be maintained in till such time as they are needed by yourself or you are transferred."

"Very well human," Zamanee said signing the screen then in his own language. "Maintain them your feeble mind couldn't even work them."

"Before you insult someone you should see if they know the language you insult them in," Jones said in the Elite's language without looking up.

"Agreed," Zamanee said in English again clearly surprised. He then placed his carbine on the desk before he removed his weapons harness that had his pistol, grenades and magazines for the carbine clipped to it. Jones printed out two tags and placed one on the carbine and the other on the harness.

"A copy of this foam is available on your ID disk," Jones explained. "When you need your weapon hand your disk to the armor so he can pull up your foam and give you the correct weapons." Jones handed the disk back to Zamanee who accepted it and yanked it away from Jones's grasp.

"Anything else human?" Zamanee asked clearly annoyed.

"Just one thing," Jones said leaning back in his chair and dropping his right hand to his belt. "Fraternization is strictly forbidden. You are permitted to have a single mate brought aboard if both parties fill out and sign foam 7372. Keep in mind this is a warship not a pleasure cruise, you and you alone are responsible for their safety. With that in mind you cannot under any circumstances fraternization with any humans male or female."

"What makes you think you could stop me from fornicating if I wanted to?" Zamanee asked not trying to hide the challenge in his voice."

"It wouldn't be just me," Jones explained sitting up again his right hand still on his belt. "But I have my ways."

"Do you?" Zamanee demanded getting to his feet and placing his hands on Jones's desk looking him in the eyes. "Prove it." Jones sighed always the first Elite had to challenge him well at least the blue rookies did. In one quick movement Jones used his right hand to pull his stun stick free of his belt, pushed the button causing a spark to arc between the two prongs, and jabbed the Elite in the gut with it sending a few thousand volts through his body. Zamanee fell to the ground as the electricity forced his muscles to contract and him to spasm on the deck.

"Alright please head though the door someone will show you to your quarters," Jones said in a even tone getting to his feet and placing the baton back on his belt. Zamanee had gotten back to his feet again his eyes ablaze with fury. His right hand touched his bare hip where his pistol would have been, Jones saw this. "Why do think I always take your weapons before I tell you the last bit?" Jones asked his voice verging on a chuckle.

"I do not require them!" Zamanee shouted as he advanced on Jones. Jones snapped his pistol up pulling the slide back and letting it snap forward, he had a round already chambered but the loud metal click got his point across.

"Just stray where you are," Jones ordered his voice still even. Jones looked past Zamanee to see that the Elites behind him were pointing their weapons at him.

"You shoot me you die human," Zamanee said slowly walking closer.

"Enough!" Hamanee barked stepping up to Zamanee. "Leave and go to your quarters now! You're on half rations for a week due to your outburst!"

"Understood Excellency!" Zamanee shouted coming to attention.

"Leave my sight at once," Hamanee ordered and Zamanee ran from the launch bay. Jones holstered his pistol and calmly walked back to his desk sitting down.

"Next," Jones said holding out his hand to accept the Elite's ID disk. It took him two and a half hours but Jones had finished in processing the other 38 Elites and was working with the last one a veteran in dented dull red armor. He had said very few words but answered all of Jones's questions and was respectful. He had been staring at Jones the entire time and continued to stare at him as he typed up the Elite's foams.

"Have you heard the tale of the Specter?" He asked suddenly. Jones still didn't look up as he finished the foam and printed it out handing him a copy.

"I can't say I have Mister Vanee," Jones said gathering up his plasma rifle and energy sword.

"You must let me tell you," Vanee said.

"Look I'm not trying to be disrespectful," Jones said adding Vanee's weapons to the cart with all the others. "But I have a lot of work to do I have to log and store all these weapons and calibrate them."

"Then you must let me buy you a drink when you are finished," Vanee said getting to his feet as well. If Jones didn't know any better he sounded almost dispirit. Free alcohol was a free alcohol though.

"Alright," Jones said pushing the cart towards the door.

"Excellent," Vanee said also moving towards the door. "Please meet me at the ship's cantina when you have completed your task."

"Will do," Jones said leaving the launch bay. Jones pushed the cart only stopping at the armory where he had gotten his pistol belt and entered the code to open the door.

"After noon sergeant," Private Regenold greeted as Jones walked in. "What are you doing out of cryo sleep?"

"You got any coffee?" Jones asked as he pushed the cart up to the weapon cage door.

"Of course," Regenold said as he watched Jones open the door and pour himself a cup. "You're not going to ask?"

"Don't make me pull rank Private," Jones said taking a sip from a paper cup. "I got a lot of work to do." Jones pick up the a carbine and looked at the tag and the serial number he assigned to it. He entered the number into a machine and it popped out a metal plate with the number engraved on it. He took the plate and wielded it to the carbine scanning the plate when he was done to finish entering it to the ship's armory. Once he had done this to all the weapons logged and in the system he took them to the test range along with his tool box. After accepted the job of in processing the incoming Elites they gave him MP training and armorer training. From both human and Covenant teachers that included aim ailment calibration, recharging of power cores, and basic repairs of Covenant weapons.

"You know I have never fired a Covenant weapon before," Regenold said.

"So?" Jones asked as he shouldered the carbine he had started with, already knowing the answer.

"Maybe I could shoot one?" Regenold asked.

"No," Jones said as he fired at the target three times. He then looked at the target saw that the grouping was close enough together and pretty much on center. Satisfied he placed it back on the cart. He then moved to the next carbine and repeated the process this time the group was close enough together but was off center. He put the carbine on a work bench and moved on to the next weapon. He had tested them all and found only three needing work. Using the tools the Elites had given he opened them up and made the necessary adjustments and retested them. That complete he stored them all and locked them up. It had taken him four hours to finish and he didn't think Vanee would still be waiting for him but he went to the bar anyway and sure enough he was sitting at a table in the corner.

"Over here!" He shouted waving his arm. Jones walked over to him happy that they and the bartender were the only ones in there at the moment.

"Ok it's been a long day," Jones said as he sat down across from him. "And I'm very tired so just tell me what this Specter is."

"Very well," Vanee said handing Jones his drink. "A few years ago we had a major operation on Xutan. I believed your race called it Sole 7."

"What about it?" Jones asked a little alarmed now.

"So you know of it," Vanee said taking a drink. "Moving on with the tale the short side is our main base of operations was destroyed. However a witness saw a human float down from one of our ships and threw lighting from his hand killing a large group of our troops. This human then left the area the ship self destructing later completely wiping out the base. It was concluded that he had done it."

"What of the witness?" Jones asked not liking where this was going.

"He was a overseer who was watching the base when he saw the human,"

Vanee explained. "And the explosion. Two days after that the same human was seen attacking our major command and control center. A Grunt in a...how do you say it...a...lox hole."

"Fox hole," Jones corrected.

"Right fox hole," Vanee carried on. "He said the human waved his hand and a wall of fire shot from the ground. He said the human then leapt from the cliff landed on the ground and when he appeared to be wounded he waved his hand again the whole base exploded. Since then we named him The Specter."

"I see," Jones said finishing his drink and standing up. "Well that was a great story but I have to go now."

"Wait my tale is not complete," Vanee said holding out a hand. Jones sat back down heavily. "Time had passed and The Specter was over shadowed by your demon. Are you familiar with The Arbiter?"

"Yes," Jones said leaning his head on his hand.

"Did you know he has a recording device on his helmet to document all of his actions?" Vanee asked. Jones shook his head. "On a mission to retrieve a holy relic a group of your warriors were already there and mostly wiped out. Upon review of the footage The Specter was seen in a corner but he wasn't a beast. It seemed not even the plague could kill him. The Arbiter didn't see him and was too busy dealing with the plague himself to care. It was the first time anyone had poof of him. In till a mouth later when a bartender saw him close up."

"Really," Jones said becoming even more uncomfortable.

"Yes he told us how he got on the ship," Vanee explained. "The bartender severed a group of our warriors that happen to be on the same mission as him. They told him how he reached into a comrade and pulled the parasite out of him saving his life. Later on that same ship he beat a field marshal in unarmed combat."

"How do you know it was the same human?" Jones asked sweat forming on his back. "How could you even tell it was him?"

"Ah that is the heart of the matter isn't." Vanee said something changing in his voice as he leaned closer his features twisting into a sly smile. "Things about The Specter change and some are clearly exaggeration but everyone tells of a scar on the side of his face. A scar just like the one you have." Jones touched the scar on his cheek he had received on the very mission where the overseer had mistaken plasma grenades for lighting.

"I don't know what—" Jones began but Vanee cut him off.

"Don't try it," Vanee said crossing his arms. "In the time I waited for you to complete your task I might have gotten into your data system and pulled up your combat record. I may or may not have crossed reference your record with the stories about The Specter."

"So now what?" Jones asked.

"Nothing," Vanee said his voice becoming light again. "I just wanted to meet you and congratulate you."

"For what?" Jones asked now confused.

"You don't know," Vanee said truly surprised. The intercom crackled to life then.

"Sergeant Allen Jones report to the captain's quarters immediately," It demanded.

"Pardon me," Jones said getting to his feet. His mind racing Jones double timed it through the corridors see the captain was usually never a good thing, it was never a good idea to keep him waiting either. He arrived at his door and knocked quickly.

"Enter," The gruff voice said sharply. Jones walked in and managed to hide his surprise as he saw Hamanee leaning against the back wall. Jones walked to the front of the captain's desk coming to attention and saluting.

"Sir Staff Sergeant Allen Jones reporting as ordered," Jones said.

"At easy sergeant," Captain McKnight said. "Please take a seat."

"Thank you sir," Jones said sitting down in the chair in front of McKnight's desk.

"You are familiar with Field Marshal Hamanee are you not?" McKnight asked leaning back in his chair and touching his finger tips together.

"Yes sir," Jones said a little confused.

"And you are aware that a new platoon of Sangheili arrived and were placed under his command," Jones nodded. "They are 40 strong meant to be broken down into four squads, or files, of ten. However they only have three file leaders."

"Is that right sir?" Jones asked having a funny thought pop into the back of his mind.

"Indeed," Hamanee said.

"I'll get right to the heart of the matter," McKnight said. "Hamanee has asked you to be transferred to his unit as acting file leader."

"What?" Jones asked only staying in his seat from years of military discipline.

"Frankly both sides have been talking about mixed units for awhile now," McKnight explained. "You are a good enough candidate as any. You know their language and have a excellent combat record."

"They will never listen to me," Jones protested. "They would never listen to a human."

"No they wouldn't," Hamanee agreed. "But they would listen to The Specter." McKnight looked at Hamanee confused.

"You know about that?" Jones asked his face flushing a little.

"Vanee told me all about it," Hamanee explained. "And don't worry Zamanee has been dealt with and he won't be in your file. The ten warriors who will be have been informed and know your status and will follow your orders. I would say without question by they are all young bloods and have yet to see true combat."

"Do I have a choice in the matter?" Jones asked McKnight.

"Not really no," McKnight said.

"I look forward to ordering you around," Hamanee said with a sly smile.

"Just because he is in your unit he is still a marine in the UNSC and this is a test for you as it is as much as him," McKnight explained eyeing Hamanee.

"Of course Excellently," Hamanee said bowing his head slightly.

"I trust you will handle this in the upmost professional matter befitting of the UNSC," McKnight said turning back to Jones and raising an eyebrow.

"Of course sir," Jones said.

"Good dismissed," McKnight with a wave of his hand. Jones got up and saluted before he walked out of the office.

"You'll do fine," Hamanee said slapping Jones on the back as he walked by. For better or worse Jones had been made a file leader in a Sangheili unit.

12. Up hill battle

Staff Sergeant Allen Jones stood drumming his fingers on his MA5C assault rifle, a habit he couldn't seem to break, wishing he had his old MA5B back. The Silent Dawn had reached the planet's orbit not two hours ago and he was already heading down to get shot at. The Elite Field Marshal Hukan Hamanee approached Jones with nothing short of a self satisfied grin on his features.

"Do you not love the emotions you feel when riding into battle?" Hamanee asked placing a hand on Jones back.

"No, not really," Jones admitted.

"Fight with us long enough and you will," Hamanee said with a smile. "Why don't you choose a seat?" Jones looked around the dim interior of the Phantom and the odd shaped jump seats that weren't made for his spine.

"I'll stand, thanks anyway," Jones said.

Hanamee nodded and hesitated for a moment. He then reached to his side and plucked something off of his armor.

"Here take this," Hamanee said placing a object into Jones's hand.
"This confirms your status as a file leader."

"Is this what I think it is?" Jones asked as he held up the object to get a better look.

"If you mean a energy sword then yes that's what I gave you," Hamanee explained. Like many humans Jones had always wanted to use an energy sword, but have never gotten the chance to. Jones didn't know if it was because it was a good weapon(he doubted that for he didn't think he could get close enough to use it before getting killed) or it was the good old: want what you can't have. Now he was simply given one and it was about as a touching moment at the two have ever shared.

"Thanks," Jones said for he didn't know what to say.

"No thanks are required," Hamanee said placing a hand up. "It is just to show you are a group leader. It's a symbol of your authority."

"Well it is better then you last idea," Jones said with a smile. Hamanee had wanted to paint Jones's armor red not unlike the veteran Elites. Jones had protested that one: without active camouflage he would stick out like a sore thumb and two: he was the only human in the unit so it would be hard for him to be mistaken as someone else. Hamanee agreed but was clearly disappointed that he didn't get to adorn Jones with the proper colors.

"Indeed," Hamanee agreed with a nod of his head.

"The ship is descending into the planet's atmosphere," The pilot said over the com. "Prepare yourselves." Hamanee went to a empty jump seat and strapped himself in as did the rest of the Elites. Jones looked long and hard at the empty jump seat meant for him, decided it would probably hurt him more. He reached up and grabbed a bar above his head with his right hand and bent his knees slightly. The Phantom shuddered as it hit the planet's atmosphere and the outside hull began to heat up as the shields flared. Jones almost fell to the deck as his knees buckled when the Phantom lurched after it hit an air pocket when it broke through the atmosphere. Jones stood up straight again grasping the bar even tighter.

"Bumpy ride huh?" Jones asked the Elite seating next to him.

"Agreed human," He said holding on to the bars on enter side of the jump seat. Jones expected him to say something more but when he held his peace Jones did as well. The ride smoothed as the Phantom dropped below the clouds and Jones was able to let go of the bar. The Elites mean while pressed the buttons in the middle of their chest releasing the harness from their chests and shoulders.

"Two minutes till we land," The pilot said over the com again. In unison the Elites got to their feet all in exactly the same way(placing their hands on either side of their jump seats and pushing up with their hands as they stood). Now on their feet they turned, again in unison towards the front of the Phantom their heels

clicking as they brought their feet together(it was only one loud click instead of several rapid fire clicks showing once again how in sync they were). This happened in a matter of seconds and Jones found himself the only one out of sync and he slowly turned to stare at the Elite's back in front of him. The pilot opened the side hatches then and the Elites turn away from each other to look out, again their heels making one loud click. Jones turned as well only a little behind this time.

"Wow," Jones whispered under his breath. He had been to a lot of places and seen a lot of different planets but this was the most beautiful one by far. Large rolling hills covered in lush green grass, large flat plains(only on a alien planet could there be both rolling hills and plains next to each other) with clear blue streams and rivers snaking around or through them. It was hard to believe this was a war zone. Or at least it was in till Jones saw purple fire erupt from the ground and chase a Phantom on their left. The Phantom answered in kind and soon both Phantoms had left the shooters behind. The Phantoms on the left and right of Jones's slowed and started to descend as they went to drop of their troops as the one Jones rode in continued straight. The pilot finely put his craft down in a flat piece of land surrounded by hills.

"Disembark now," The pilot ordered once he had brought the ship to a hover a foot off the ground. The Elites, and Jones jumped, the Elites landing at the same time of each other while Jones(who swears to have jumped at the same time) landed a little behind them still out of sync.

"Form files but stay in your current positions," Hamanee ordered instantly taking command. "File leaders move to my position." A yellow diamond appeared in Jones's HUD(the eye pieces had been replaced with visors sporting a Heads Up Display complete with navigation, weapon status minus the aim reticule and monition tracker) telling him where to go. It had taken the techs some time but they had managed to sync his equipment(but clearly not himself) with the Elites to including coms. Jones jogged up a hill to find Hamanee, Vanee and the other two file leaders already there. One of them shot Jones a glance but held his tongue if he did say what he was thinking Jones would guess it would be along the lines of: nice of you to finely join us human.

"Observe that hill in the distance," Hamanee said holding a monocular to his right eye. "The one with structure on top." Jones brought his field glasses to his eyes as the other file leader used their own monoculars. Jones saw that the structure was one of those floating platforms the Covenant had liked to use as watch towers. Jones could also see the 15 to 20 Brutes milling on the crest of the hill. Also on the top of the hill were piles of crates and sloppily made barricades.

"Our objective Excellently?" Vanee asked.

"Take the hill securing the flank and clearing the path for an armor convoy," Hamanee explained. "Suggestions?"

"The other hills give us a clear path to advance to the foot of the hill," One of the file leaders said pointing. "Once there we can charge the hill, we have then in both numbers and skill we will obliterate them with only a few fallen."

"I concur," The second file leader said.

"I must also agree," Vanee said thirdly lowering his monocular.

"What about you Jones do you agree?" Hamanee asked. Jones still held his field glasses to his face as he thought about what to say. In short no(well maybe hell no or fuck no) he didn't agree with it at all. The Sangheili were different from him and saw dying in combat different then he did, hell they saw combat different.

"I agree but," Jones said taking a deep breath. "I suggest you let me take my file up to the hill to the left overlooking the objective. There are no contacts there and we can make it up the back side without being spotted. The higher elevation will give us a great vantage point for picking off the Brutes while drawing their attention allowing the rest of the troops to charge up the other side and kill them with even more ease." Jones finely lowered his field glasses and waited for the ridicule. Hamanee turned his monocular to the hill Jones had indicated then back to the hill held by the Brutes.

"Leave it to a human to want to miss the heart of combat," A file leader whispered to Vanee. Vanee looked at him but was unsure of what to say but by then Hamanee had lowered his monocular and turned to face the rest of them.

"I agree with Jones splitting up our forces like that would allow us to vanquish the beasts quicker," Hamanee explained then turning to Jones. "Is your file properly equipped for the task at hand?" Jones's Elites was all armed with carbines with plasma pistols for back up and only two grenades each. This made them the human equivalent of a fire team perfect for providing support at medium to long range. The other two file leaders had Elites armed with plasma rifles or needlers plus half a dozen grenades making them assault teams ideal for pushing through and clearing objectives at short range. Vanee had a mixture of both carbines and plasma rifles plus the heavy weapon troopers.

"If I could get a fuel rod cannon Excellently," Jones said respectfully. "I would be then."

"Vanee give him what he requires," Hamanee ordered walking back down the hill. "Return to your files and inform them of the plan. Jones go to your hill be there no later than 20 minutes from now. The rest of you take your files and follow me to the foot of the objective we will attack on Jones's signal."

"Yes Excellently," The three Elites and Jones said in unison(Jones finely in sync for the first time). Jones fallowed Vanee back to his file where he relived one of his troops of his fuel rod cannon and placed it on Jones's shoulder.

"Do you require anything else?" Vanee asked.

"Nope I'm good," Jones grunted under the weight of the weapon. "Thanks." Jones walked away leaning dangerously to the right as the weight from the fuel rod cannon threatened to topple him. He managed to make it back to his file before it did.

"Mortumee report," Jones grunted the order his arms beginning to shake. Mortumee jogged over to Jones and came to attention in front of him, although he had to look down.

"Present as requested," Mortumee said.

"Here," Jones grunted using every bit of strength he had to left the weapon up to Mortumee. "Take this fuel rod cannon."

"Of course file leader," Mortumee said reaching down to pluck the cannon off of Jones's shoulder and moved it easily and gracefully on to his own shoulder.

"I trust you know how to us it?" Jones asked.

"I have sufficient knowledge to operate this weapon system," Mortumee explained.

"Good," Jones said rubbing the back of his head. "Fall in we have a objective." Jones fallowed Mortumee back to his file where they formed a semicircle around him.

"Alright me-" Jones caught himself in time. "Troops. Our objective is to take a hill from enemy hands to clear the way for a armor column."

"Which hill file leader?" Putumee asked.

"The one with the hovering platform on top of it," Jones said hooking a thumb over his shoulder. Putumee leaned over so he could look past Jones, he could just make out the hill and the platform.

"Very well continue," Putumee said.

"Our objective," Jones explained. "Is to take that hill overlooking the enemy's hill." Jones pointed in front of him and the Elites all turned around to look at the hill.

"How strong is the enemy presence there?" Mortumee asked moving the fuel rod cannon for one shoulder to the other.

"There is none on that hill," Jones started.

"If there are no hostiles why are we taking the hill?" Putumee demanded interrupting Jones.

"Don't interrupt me," Jones said sharply shooting Putumee a glare.

"My apologies file leader," Putumee said bring his right fist to his left shoulder and bowed slightly.

"The plan was to attack the hill head on in file order," Jones explained. "We being the fourth file we would have gone last and there wouldn't have been many Brutes for us to kill."

"Agreed," Putumee said accidentally interrupting Jones again. He realized this and bowed again bring his fist to his shoulder.

"I convinced Field Marshal Hamanee to let us go to that hill overlooking the enemy position," Jones explained. "Once there the rest of the files will wait for our order to attack. We will pour fire on to them and kill as many of them as we can before the other files assault the hill. Our job is twofold first kill as many Brutes as possible, second draw their attention so the other files can hit them from behind. Questions?"

"Why do I require this?" Mortumee asked hoisting the fuel rod cannon.

"You're going to use that as the opening salvo," Jones said. "Now fall in on me and let's move out." As Jones walked off he couldn't believe how quickly and easily he had game up with the whole: not that many for us to kill lie. The truth be told he did not want to charge up an enemy hill even if they were the superior force. To Jones his idea was just smarter at least to his way of thinking. When Jones, with his file behind him, reached the open area and he had worked the path to the hill out in his mind he gave the order.

"Let's go," Jones said rolling his shoulder forwards like he was throwing a ball the signal for move out in the UNSC. Jones then brought a knife hand to his face and placed on his noise, he looked like he was going to block someone from poking him in the eyes. The Elite behind him nodded and mirrored him turning around so the other Elites could see. They then got into single file formation as the hand signal dictated. Before they had left the Silent Dawn Hamanee had taught Jones their formations and common commands while Jones had taught his file the formations and commands he was familiar with. They marched in silence and without incident to the foot of the hill Jones had indicated. They giving the hand signal for wedge formation Jones lead them to just below the crest of the hill where he stopped raising a fist into the air. He then opened it up to a flat palm and slowly moved it to the ground the Elites went prone the high grass rendering them invisible.

"Alright," Jones whispered into his helmet mike as he himself laid down. "Stay low and stay on line in till you reach the edge of the hill on the other side. Once there hold your position and do not open fire in till ordered. Confirm last order."

"Confirmed file leader," They each radioed back one at a time.

"Good now move out," Jones ordered starting to crawl forward. It was slow going in till Jones reached the crest and the ground flattened out a little. Jones had taught them how to low crawl and they had picked it up very quickly, as if to prove this Jones was the last one in position. Jones removed his field glasses and pressed them up to his eyes. Through the magnified lenses Jones could see the Brutes still milling around below and creeping up on them was Hamanee's forces.

"Why do we not attack?" Putumee asked Jones via radio.

"We are waiting for Field Marshal Hamanee's command," Jones explained with a sigh.

"Understood file leader," Putumee said his voice cooled. Jones watched the Brutes for a few more minutes when Hamanee's voice spoke

up in his ear.

"Jones are you receiving me?" He asked.

"Loud and clear Excellently," Jones radioed back.

"We are in position," Hamanee explained. "Engage at your discretion."—

—"Confirmed," Jones said and then keyed his file's frequency.
"Mortumee do you see the floating platform?"—

—"Indeed I do file leader," Mortumee radioed back.—

—"I want you to take it out with your fuel rod cannon," Jones said laying out his plan. "Fire enough shots as your feel it's necessary to destroy it. Then empty what's left in the clip into whatever targets you see fit. The rest of you only open fire after the first round hits, Mortumee switch to your carbine and join them. Pick your targets and drops as many as you can before they get to cover and fire back. Understood?"—

—"Understood file leader," They radioed to him.—

—"Ok," Jones said slowly. "Fire." The ground shuddered a few feet from Jones as Mortumee emptied his fuel rod cannon at the hill. Jones felt his heart begin to race as he watched the glowing green blobs lazily make their way towards the hill. He watched with satisfaction as the first two impacted the tower destroying it and killing the two Brutes that were in it.—

—"Open fire!" Jones shouted. The Elites opened up with their carbines hosing the unprotected Brutes with energy fire. Jones switched his assault rifle to semi and fired at a Brute that was running for a create. Jones's rounds hit his square on forcing him to stop. The rest of Jones shots were easy hits to bring the bastard down. By then the Brutes were either behind cover or already dead and were firing back in kind. However with the disbanding of the Covenant they had lost most of their plasma weapons and had to rely on their weapons. The only one of which that had the range to reach Jones's troops was the spiker. That and the fact that they didn't know where Jones was on the hill left them firing blindly mostly hitting the side of the hill not even close to Jones or his troops.—

—"Keep firing!" Jones shouted again. "Kill them if you can but at least kept them behind cover!" Jones laid his assault rifle down and placed his field glasses back up to his eyes, just in time to see Hamanee appear over the top of the hill opposite of Brutes. As Jones watched more of Hamanee's troops reached the top of the hill and charge the Brutes from behind.—

—"Jones," Hamanee shouted in his ear via radio. "Adjust your fire."—

—"Shift fire! Shift fire!" Jones shouted. "Fire at the ground in front of the Brutes don't hit our troops!" The Elites didn't verbally acknowledge his ordered but he could see their shots hit the ground in front of the Brutes kicking up dirt and burning the grass. Jones watched Hamanee and his troops get almost to the Brutes before he gave the command.—

_ "Cease fire! Cease fire!" Jones shouted waving his hand in front of his face, the signal for cease fire. The fire didn't taper off as Jones thought but stopped all at once. Jones looked back through his field glasses to see Hamanee's troops pour fire onto the Brutes' unprotected backs, killing most before they could even turn around. A smile came to Jones's face at that when he saw a plasma bolt impact the hill._

_ "Who fired?!" Jones demanded dropping his field glasses again._

_ "No one file leader," Mortumee said confused. Jones turned his field glasses back on the hill and saw more bolts hit it aimed at Hamanee and his Elites. Jones quickly followed them back to their point of origin a hill next to his own but at an even higher elevation. Jones observed the hill for a few more seconds, he could see plasma and spiker fire erupted from it. It was clear that there were Brutes on that hill as well that neither he nor Hamanee had known about. Jones couldn't tell how many there were because of the elevation but he knew that they would slaughter Hamanee. Not liking his choices but coming up with nothing better in the given time Jones jumped to his feet and jerked the energy sword from his belt._

_ "Take the hill!" Jones shouted activating the sword and using it to point at the hill the fire was coming from. "Charge!" Jones's Elites leapt to their feet and let out a battle cry as they ran at the hill. Jones was in the lead running full tilt swing the energy sword as he did so. Jones may have been in the lead but the Elites' were in better shape and their natural build made them better sprinters. They started to pass Jones and he felt a wave of embarrassment over take him as he looked over to see Putumee pass him not even breathing hard while he himself was huffing and puffing. Jones did what he did in basic training when he was forced to run up and down hills and on the way down he didn't slow and let the slope of the hill push him faster. He managed to push ahead of the Elites again as he flew down the hill almost tripping a few times but half way up the other hill he started to lose momentum and the Elites caught him easily._

_ "Kill them all!" Putumee shouted as he reached the top of the hill and fired his carbine before disappearing from Jones's view. Jones ran with renewed energy as more of his Elites reached to top of the hill to engage the Brutes. Jones was not the last one to reach the top, Mortumee was, but Jones felt like he had let him beat him. When Jones reached the top his Elites had everything under control as the Brutes had not expected them to charge their hill and they were only eight Brutes. Jones watched as the last few Brutes were cornered and gun downed. He turned to his right to Putumee unload his carbine into a Brute that had popped up from cover. Before the Brute was cut down however Putumee's carbine stopped firing, he shouted in anger as he hurried to reload it. The Brute sensing his opportunity raised his spiker and empty its magazine into Putumee. Jones watched as his shields over loaded and he fell to the ground in a yell of pain._

_ "No!" Jones shouted running at the Brute brandishing the energy sword. The Brute turned to face Jones and his eyes widen when he saw the human charging him with the energy sword. The Brute pulled out the empty magazine and tried to quickly shove a new one in but Jones was quicker. Jones plunged the sword into the Brute's gut the blade going in easily. The Brute fell to his knees dropping his weapon and placing his right hand on Jones's shoulder for support. Jones sneered

as he pushed the blade in farther his hand touching the Brute's stomach and the blood that spilled onto it._

_ "Enjoy your time in hell!" Jones shouted placing his right foot on to the Brute's chest. Then kicking with his foot and pulling back with his hand Jones removed the energy sword from the Brute who flopped back and gasped for breath. Jones walked over to where the Brute lay and put his boot onto his throat before driving the blade into his head. Jones pulled the sword free again and held it at his side._

_ On the other hill that had once been controlled by the Brutes, Hamanee rose up from where he had taken cover from the Brute's fire. He looked up at the hill the weapon fire had came from to see Jones standing on top of it holding a bloody energy sword. Hamanee felt a overwhelming senesce of pride at Jones then, the kind of pride a father would feel for his son. Hamanee watched as Jones deactivated the energy sword, running to and kneeing next to something. Hamanee could tell right away that something was wrong._

_ "Fetch the medics," Hamanee ordered turning to Vanee. "Send them to Jones's group."_

_ "Of course Excellency," Vanee said running to find them._

_ Back on Jones's hill, he knelt next to the wounded Putumee. Three spikes had found their way past his shield and had hit him in the shoulder, the chest, and stomach. Jones pulled out his CLS(Combat Life Saver) bag and ripped it open. The CLS bag hand more than the personal first aid kits he and his fellow marines carried but wasn't as complete as a medic's pack. Jones looked Putumee over quickly and by the way he was gasping for breath he could tell he had a sucking chest wound. Jones, as gently as he could, removed Putumee's chest plat exposing his bare chest. Jones reached into the bag and pulled out the air tight self adhering dressing and removed the backing. Holding the dressing in his left hand Jones grabbed the spike in Putumee's chest with his right._

_ "This is going to hurt," Jones said calmly just before he pulled the spike out. Putumee let out a whale of pain before Jones slapped the dressing on the hole, preventing anymore air from entering his chest cavity, but now Jones had to get the air that already gotten in out. Jones pulled out a needle with a one way valve at the end. Jones then pressed on Putumee's chest trying to find the space between the second and third rib. Jones had no idea if the Sangheili's physiology was even close to his own, where he had a space between his second and third rib where it was safe to place the needle. Jones didn't know if he was going to stab something vital but he did know if he didn't let the air out Putumee was going to suffocate. Jones raised the needle high and brought it down hard piercing the soldier's chest. Putumee grunted in pain but he seemed to be ok and no excessive amount of blood flowed from the hole. Jones opened the valve, a gust of air came out as the Elite drew in a full breath. Jones closed the valve once Putumee was breathing normally and the air had stopped coming out._

_ "Thank you human," Putumee managed._

_ "Don't thank me yet," Jones said pulling out a small bottle of bio foam and bandage roll. Jones turned his attention to the spike in

Putumee's stomach, where there was some moderate blood flow. Before bio foam soldiers were trained to leave a object in a wound, for it helped stop the bleeding, and bandage the wound around the object. Once they were at the aid center the combat surgeon would remove it. That was then and this was now, so Jones pulled the spike out slowly. Putumee grunted as Jones did so and then hissed in pain as Jones filled the hole with bio foam. Jones placed the bandage on the wound and pressed down with his left hand the blood on it staining the white cloth purple. Jones wrapped the wound tightly effectively stopping the bleeding. The life threatening wounds taken care of Jones patched up Putumee's shoulder._

_ "You will live to fight again," Jones said rolling Putumee on his side so he could breath easier. Jones felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see a Sangheili medic standing over him._

_ "I will tend to him," The medic said. "Please leave us." Jones walked away and right into Hamanee._

_ "You performed perfectly," Hamanee said placing a hand on Jones shoulder._

_ "I don't feel like I did," Jones said looking down to where Putumee lay._

_ "He was the only casualty we suffered this battle," Hamanee explained. "And he will live. Be joyous Jones, for the battle is ours."_

13. Death from above

The battle may have been theirs but it was far from over. With Putumee stabilized and evacuated for treatment Hamanee had ordered Jones to hold the hill he had taken from the Brutes. Jones spread his Elites around the crest of the hill giving them a commanding 360 view of the surrounding area. The tall grass hid the Elites despite the fact they were wearing bright blue armor, giving them both the advantage of elevation and surprise. A half an hour passed without incident when a loud low grumble caused Jones to stand up. He brought his field glasses to his eyes and turned towards the source of the noise. Through the tinted lenses Jones could see the armor column made up of Scorpions and Warthogs, snaking its way around the hills. In the horizon Jones could see Pelican drop ships landing troops on different hills, a obvious vanguard action.

"Jones," Hamanee said in Jones's ear via radio.

"I read you Excellently," Jones said keying his mike.

"Your human more-rines are taking over our positions," Hamanee explained. "Guide them to your hill, then once relived regroup with me at my position. We are joining the column for the assault on the Jiralhanae stronghold."

"Solid copy," Jones said. "Will do out." Jones pulled the smoke grenade off of his belt, pulled the pin and let it roll out of his hand, it landing at his feet. Jones took a step back as a column of red smoke twisted its way up to the sky. Jones pressed the field glasses to his eyes again in time to see a Pelican peel off from the

main group and head towards Jones and his smoke. Jones watched the Pelican all the way in dropping his field glasses when it got close enough. The Pelican hovered in the middle of the hill top causing Jones to duck his head, as the Pelican's jets whipped up dirt and grass. 12 marines disembarked from the drop ship before it flew off the squad leader, a fellow staff sergeant, walked up to Jones.

"How'd you get here so fast?" He asked Jones as his marines spread out taking a knee as they did so.

"I lead a squad to take this hill," Jones explained.

"Where are your men?" He asked looking around confused. Jones smirked at that just before he spook in the Elite's language.

"On your feet!" Jones shouted so they could hear. "Let's move out." The marines watched stunned as the Elites stood up seeming to materialize from the ground itself. They were even more shocked when the Elites followed Jones down the hill. Jones found Hamanee and his troops next to a Scorpion and a marine captain.

"Reporting as ordered Excellently," Jones said then turning towards the captain. "Sir."

"We have a new objective," Hamanee said crossing his arms.

"We do?" Jones asked.

"Yes," The captain said turning to face Jones. "I was already briefing the...the..."

"Field Marshal," Hamanee said helping the captain out.

"Yes thank you," The captain said. "The Field Marshal that once we get past these hills we have a village to clear before getting to the fort."

"A village?" Jones asked rising an eyebrow.

"Do not concern yourself," Hamanee said reassuringly. "There are nothing but warriors in that village. It's more of how you say an..."

"Outpost," The captain corrected for Hamanee.

"Alright," Jones said his mind put at ease. "What's our role?"

"We are going to hit the village hard and fast," The captain explained. "Good old shock and awe. While the armor rolls through the Elites will form a firing line and sweep the village. It doesn't have to be squeaky clean we have a vanguard of marine personal coming in behind us. They are going to scrub the village and clear it to make way for our forward operating base."

"Just us?" Jones asked looking around at the remaining 39 Elites that made up Hamanee's platoon.

"The other platoons that came in with us will be joining us as well," Hamanee explained before the captain could.

"Alright let's do it," Jones said.

"Oorah," The captain said. "Mount up and lets go." The captain got back into the Scorpion and sealed the hatch behind him.

"Five on that tank," Jones said pointing at the Scorpion behind the captain's. "The rest with me." Jones climbed on to the captain's Scorpion sitting near the turret the Elites following him sitting where they could. A moment later the tank lurched forward, Jones grabbed on to something to keep from falling. Jones had never ridden on a tank and other then crossing short distances it seemed very impractical. However the steady rumble of the engine and squeaking of the tracks caused Jones to feel an almost overwhelming sense of power. The column cleared the rolling hills and started up a gently sloping massive hill. As they started up the hill Jones looked behind him and saw the Scorpions and Warthogs, spread out from a single file line to a firing line formation. When the vehicles reached the top of hill Jones saw it became flat lands with a cluster of tents and buildings off in the distance. The line of vehicles came to a stop 600 meters from the village.

"Let's have a looks see," Jones said bring his field glasses up. Jones could see Brutes rushing to get behind barricades or jump into trenches built and dug in front of the village facing them. Jones looked as more rushed out of tents in different states of dress hurrying to grab weapons and man the defenses.

"Form a battle line," Hamanee ordered via radio. Jones ordered his nine remain Elites into a line between two Scorpions. Jones ejected the half spent magazine in his assault rifle and shoved a new one in the ammo counter reading 33(for he had one in the chamber plus a fresh 32 round magazine).

"Alright cover your ears this is going to get loud," The marine captain said over the radio. Jones counted his heart beats as he waited for something to happen. After 27 beats and still nothing happened Jones looked around confused as did his Elites(more out of confusion why they didn't attack for they had not heard the captain, only file leaders and field marshals got radios that went between both the Elites' and human frequencies). A low whine reached Jones ears forcing him to snap his head around. He brought his field glasses to his eyes once again to see a flight of Pelicans in wedge formation. He now understood as the whine became a dull roar then a deafening one as they passed over head. Jones lowered his glasses as the first of the dumb bombs impacted the Brute line. More dropped and hit sending up blossoms of dirt and body parts as the Pelicans flew over the village.

"Fire!" The captain shouted the message relayed over the radio. A heart beat later the Scorpions sent shells down range before the last of the bombs had even dropped. Each tank fired a total of five rounds as the Warthogs peppered the area with heavy automatic fire. The vehicles lurched forward, still firing, at a crawl so the Elites could walk with them. Jones waved his Elites forward to kept them between the two Scorpions.

"Don't break ranks!" Jones shouted over the sound of explosions and engines. "Only kill what's in front of you and remember there is a warrior to your left and right!" Once they were 50 meters from the

village the Warthogs stopped firing randomly, only at specific targets while the tanks had ceased fire altogether. Jones stepped over the smoking corpse of a Brute as he entered the village as the Scorpion to his right crushed a barricade. A Brute stumbled out of a tent in front of Jones's line and it was hard to tell who killed him as all of the Elites fried on him. Jones was forced to step over his smoking remains as well. They passed other bodies blown to bits and obliterated buildings but no more living combatants. Once they were 500 meters on the opposite side of the village the vehicles came to a stop again.

"Lace report (Lace stood for liquid ammo casualties and equipment)," The captain ordered over radio.

"Alpha: amber, amber, up, up," A voice said over the radio.

"Bravo: amber, amber, up, up," A second voice said.

"Charlie: amber, amber, up, up," A female voice said this time.

"Delta: amber, red, up, up," A gruff voice said.

"Confirmed," The captain said. "Alpha, Bravo and Charlie give some ammo to Delta." Jones couldn't believe it they had just wiped out a major Brute installation without a single casualty. Jones's mind flashed back to Putumee and he winched..

"Dismounted troops mount back up," The captain ordered over the radio his voice coming in Jones's ear.

"Board the tanks again!" Jones shouted. "Same groups as before!" Jones hurried to take his seat on the captain's Scorpion. After the ammo had been divided up and given to Delta the vehicles staying in the firing line started forward again. They came to a stop five minutes later in front of a box canyon and set against the high cliff walls was a impressive looking fort. Jones pressed the field glasses to his eyes with shaking hands. The fort seemed to jump forward at him and he could see the high thick walls. Along with the gun emplacements that lined them, Brutes on top of the walls and the bunkers bristling with energy weapons. He could also see the hardened buildings and anti air emplacements nearby with thousands of Brutes milling about..

"Holy shit," Jones whispered under his breath. "Those no way were are taking that."

"It's a good thing we aren't," A voice said surprising Jones. Jones quickly dropped his field glasses to see the captain had poked through the hatch with his own field glasses pressed to his eyes..

"Sir I didn't mean to-," Jones stammered.

"Easy sergeant," The captain said lowering his glasses. "What's your name?"

"Uh my name?" Jones asked clearly confused.

"Yes your name," The captain said with a smile.

— "Jones sir," Jones said a little unsure. —

— "Sergeant Jones," The captain said with a warm smile. "I'm Captain Hoff." —

— "Nice to meet you sir," Jones said still unsure. —

— "We're not going to take that fort," Hoff explained. "We're going to destroy it." —

— "How?" Jones asked. Hoff smiled again as he keyed the Scorpion's long range radio. —

— "Hell fire this Hell storm over," Hoff said into the hand set. —

— "Go ahead Hell storm," A voice on the other end said. —

— "We have located enemy stronghold at grind X-ray three five eight nine by Zulu one four five zero. Proceed with heavy rain authorization code: Tango foxtrot four niner whiskey x-ray over," Captain Hoff said. —

— "Confirm enemy location at grind X-ray three five eight niner by Zulu one four five zero. Authorization code: Tango foxtrot four niner whiskey x-ray authenticated," The voice said. "Proceeding with heavy rain out." Hoff turned to Jones then. —

— "Get ready for the fireworks sergeant," Hoff said that smile never leaving his face. —

— The Silent Dawn was the first ship of its kind, an advance prototype, what the UNSC high command called a planetary siege craft and what the enlisted called planet killers. What made the Silent Dawn different was that it was a massive ship bigger than the UNSC super carriers, but only had a single MAC and only 40 ship to ship missile pods. Most of its bulk came from the over sized vehicles bays, massive barracks, huge cryo bays, full sized repair shops, numerous launch bays housing all manner of craft and fully capable medical facilities. Everything that was needed to launch and sustained a massive planetary assault. It wasn't just that it carried a lot of troops, it was also that it had the ability to support them from orbit as well that made it different for other carriers. It had 120 space to ground missile pods with missile encased in depleted uranium shells to survive the trip through a planet's atmosphere. Also on each side of the ship itself were two rows of 200 mm space to ground cannons that launched depleted uranium high explosive shells at supersonic speeds so in most chases the round's impact did just as much damage(if not more) as the explosive itself.

In the port side gun bays the gunners hurried to use the cranes to load the massive guns with the huge shells. In order to save space and money(mainly money) the guns weren't loaded automatically as planed but had a large crane apiece and used a lot of personal to load them. This decreased the firing time quite a bit and required a lot of back breaking effort on part of the gunners. Also while controlled and aimed by the ships computer it wasn't very accurate(hitting with in a quarter mile was average) and a single volley was very expensive. Plus the ship had to be in geosynchronous orbit over the target making it no good for quick fire support. Once all 60 guns(two rows of 30) were loaded the gunners retreated to a

safe distance as not to be hurt by the guns' recoil. One of them radioed the all clear and guns were fired one at a time in quick succession and once they were emptied the gunners rushed in to reload them.

Back on the planet still idling just outside of the fort's range was the line of vehicles under the command of Captain Hoff. It had been a total of seven minutes since Hoff had radioed the Silent Dawn and still nothing had happened._

_ "Sir what are we waiting for again?" Jones asked Captain Hoff._

_ "You'll know sergeant," Hoff said. "You'll know." Jones looked through his field glasses again to see the Brutes had massed along their walls. Jones couldn't quite make it out but he thought some of them were using their own optical devices probably wondering the same thing he was: what the fuck are they waiting for? Jones heard the high pitched whistle and looked up to see the fire balls racing towards the fort. Jones blinked and the first ones had impacted making a noise like thunder and shaking the ground so fiercely Jones could feel it back where he was. More shells hit the fort and Jones fell off the tank as the ground shook more violently from the quick successions of impacts. As quickly as it had started it had stopped and Jones slowly got to his feet. He slowly brought up his glasses again to look at the fort. Though he couldn't call it a fort anymore just a large smoking crater full of twisted debris. Five minutes later the second volley hit taking the fort from destroyed to annihilated. Jones lowered his field glasses slowly, he was able to stay on his feet that time._

_ "Holy shit," Jones said. "That was fucking awesome."_

_ "Oorah!" Hoff said just before he disappeared back into his tank. Jones climbed back on top of the Scorpion._

_ "What was that?" Mortumee asked Jones.

"That was Hell fire," Jones said. With that the vehicles slowly turned around and left the fort heading back towards the village. The marines had been busy as all the Brute bodies had been stacked in a pile while a few other marines doused them with fuel and set them ablaze. 300 meters from the village marine engineers were hard at work setting up the FOB. Three buildings in the three phase of construction stood next to each other, with more to follow. One was a hole the engineers were still excavating, the second a finished hole that they poured quick drying concrete into while placing large metal hooks in the still soft muck. The third was a concrete slab that was fully hardened and the hooks placed. A engineer guided a very large specialized drop ship that carried a prefabricated building over the concrete slab. With the help of two other engineers they lined up slots on the building with the hooks in the concrete and the pilot put it down on the hooks. Free of its burden the ship flew off into the bright sky. The three engineers quickly used hammers to lock the hooks into place.

"You there," One engineer said to another. "Go inside make sure everything made the trip intact." The engineer rushed inside to inspect the bunk beds for damage, the foot lockers worked and started to hook up the tubes and hoses that would become the barracks's plumbing. It took the rest of the day and a good part of the night

but the FOB was fully operational. While the humans toiled to run the base and pull guard duty the Elites celebrated. Officially assigned to a Sangheili unit Jones was relieved of his normal duties to celebrate with the Elites. There was a large feast that included many of their native dishes. Many suggestions as well as things to try were given to Jones which ranged from barely edible to pretty damn good. Now stuffed and the mood good the war stories and jokes started as drinks were passed out. Jones sat at the table with the field marshals and file leaders so there were plenty of them. As the evening wound down Vanee got to his feet bring his glass with him.

"I would like to congratulate our newest," Vanee began in a booming voice so all could hear. "And only human file leader. I must admit I had my doubts, however he is brave as he is wise. May he be graced with numerous victories." Vanee looked directly at Jones as he downed his drink.

"Numerous victories!" The rest of the Elites shouted before they downed their own drinks. Jones finished his own drink as Vanee sat back down and talk turned to other matters. Jones got up and walked out of the Elites' barracks and walked the short distance to the base's outer fence. Jones took out his dwindling pack of cigarettes, shook one out and lit it. As he puffed on it he gazed into the darkened field beyond.

"Mind if I join you?" Hamanee asked walking up to Jones.

"Of course not Excellently," Jones said exhaling a cloud of smoke.

"You may dismiss the formalities when not in front of others," Hamanee explained with the raise of his hand. "You are my friend." Jones grunted a bitter laugh then, how they had meet was horrible yet now they were 'friends' the irony always caused Jones to laugh.

"Something you want to talk about?" Jones asked exhaling another cloud of smoke into the night air.

"What are your plans for later?" Hamanee asked as he followed Jones's gaze.

"I'll probably go to sleep," Jones said finishing his cigarette and crushing it on the ground.

"I mean after this war," Hamanee clarified.

"If I'm not dead?" Jones asked lighting another cigarette.

"Indeed," Hamanee said giving Jones a sideways glance.

"I don't know," Jones said thoughtfully. "My home planet was destroyed and as far as I know everyone I have known is dead." Jones let out another bitter laugh. "I was drafted right after high school, I didn't even have a real job before the core. All I ever known my adult life has been combat. I guess I wouldn't know what to do with peace."

"Would you consider coming to live with us?" Hamanee asked turning to

face Jones.

"What do you mean?" Jones asked carefully still gazing at the field.

"Come live with my people," Hamanee explained. "Live on my home planet." Jones turned to face Hamanee.

"You mean live with the Sangheili?" Jones asked a little taken back. "Live on a Sangheili planet? They would never allow it, your people I mean."

"Jones," Hamanee said sighing deeply as he placed a hand on Jones's shoulder. "You have proven yourself in combat time and again. If you had been in our ranks you would have reached commando status. In our culture that is all that is required to earn respect."

"I don't know..." Jones started.

"You pounder it," Hamanee said removing his hand. "It has come down from your ground commander to our field master, who passed it down to me and now I hand it down to you. There is a reconnaissance mission you and your file must execute tomorrow. The details will be given to you the moment I get them myself."

"What about Putumee?" Jones asked turning his gaze back to the field._

_ "He will be fit to fight in a week's time," Hamanee said. "You will be getting a replacement for him in your file. For now you should get some rest to prepare for tomorrow's battle." With that Hamanee walked off into the night leaving Jones with quite a lot to think about. Jones finished his second cigarette and stomped it out next to his first. Jones lit a third one and smoked it as he mauld over what Hamanee had said._

14. Early morning recon

Jones snapped awake as he felt someone shake his arm, he looked over to see the snarling face of an Elite pressed up to his. He jerked pack in surprise and fear falling off the bottom bunk hitting the floor rather hard.

"File leader it's only me," Mortumee said helping Jones to his feet.

"Right sorry," Jones said as he rubbed his right elbow. To get the full effective of being in a Sangheili unit they had him bunk with them as well. "What time is it?"

"Nearing dawn," Mortumee answered. "There is a meeting you must attend in 30 minutes."

"Thank you," Jones said as he peeled of his shirt. "Wake the others and get them ready."

"We have a battle?" Mortumee asked hopefully.

"Not exactly," Jones said removing his shirt, grabbing his towel and

bar of soap. "Just get them ready." Mortumee nodded and walked off to wake the rest of Jones's file. Jones walked towards the showers towel over his left shoulder and soap in his right hand. He turned on the water in the first stall and tested it with his hand. He was surprised to find it was warm and not freezing cold, not even lukewarm but quite pleasant. Must be trying to impress Jones thought as he slipped off his trunks referring to command impressing the Elites. As he stepped under the warm water he found himself ok with that. He took a full three minute shower enjoying every second of it. When it was done he turned the water off and dried himself with the towel before he wrapped it around his waist. He walked back to his bunk and pulled out his uniform and fresh underwear placing it on his unmade bunk. He dropped the towel and pulled on the underwear and was about to put his pants on when he heard a voice behind him.

"File leader," Mortumee whispered behind Jones.

"What? What is it?" Jones asked a little startled.

"The file is awake and is preparing for battle," Mortumee reported.

"Ok good," Jones said buttoning up his pants. "Now go get something to eat I guess." Mortumee walked off to fulfill Jones's order. Jones finished dressing and strapping on his body armor. He walked out of the barracks just as first light was peeking up from the horizon. He made his way over to bunker the Elites were given to use as their command bunker. Jones nodded to the two sentries as they let him enter. He walked over to the corner where he had placed his coffee maker, saw the grounds floating in the black liquid and he knew Hamanee had made it for him. Sighing Jones placed a coffee filter over his mug and poured the coffee from the pot into his mug filtering it after the fact. It was drinkable then but it was freaking bitter and Jones didn't have the luxury of sugar. Jones sipped the hot liquid as he joined Field Marshal Hamanee, File leader Vanee and Field Master Nosolee at the hologram table.

"Greetings human," Nosolee said raising a hand.

"Greetings Excellently," Jones said raising his mug the coffee sloshing around inside.

"Let's begin," Nosolee said. "Hamanee?" Hamanee turned on the holo table and a 3D landscape flickered to life.

"A few miles from here in a valley protected by a wide river," Hamanee explained pointing at the hologram. "As well as tall hills and the only way across the river is a pass flanked by two hills on either side. There is strong evidence that there is a heavy enemy presents in that valley. Colonel McKay wants one of our files to perform a reconnaissance of the area."

"What's our path?" Jones asked sipping more of his coffee. "What are the zones they want reconed?"

"McKay fears they are prepared for an aerial insertion so you will have to march," Nosolee explained.

"Of course we will," Jones said dryly as he finished his coffee.

"When you reach the flat lands before the river the high grass there should let you observe the enemy without them observing you," Nosolee continued. "McKay wishes for you to observe the two hills that guard the pass for enemy strength and number. There is a forested area to the left of the flat lands that is believed to contain a narrower section of river for which you will be able to cross. The trees go along the left side of the valley so you should be able to observe the bulk of the enemy's force from the trees."

"Once that is complete it's a simple march back," Hamanee said cutting in. "A how you say: milk run?"

"That's right," Jones said refilling his mug. "Support in case things get hot?" Hamanee glanced nervously at Nosolee before answering.

"The ship has left our position to support other operations on the planet," Hamanee said carefully. "Also the are-till-oree cannons have not arrived from the ship yet and no aircraft can be risked for their anti aircraft capability is unknown."

"So what you saying is we're on our own," Jones said finishing his second mug of coffee. "This is getting better by the minute."

"Depart no later than 0800," Nosolee said. "I believe that's how it's said."

"I must inform my file," Jones said putting his mug down. Jones walked back to the barracks and was greeted by Mortumee.

"File leader," He said walking next to Jones. "We are ready to depart."

"Cool your jets," Jones said walking up to the circle of Elites that made up his file. "We don't leave..." Jones looked at his watch. "For another 47 minutes and we have a long way to go on foot so bring extra water and rations. Save some weight by going light on the ammo."

"Are we not marching to battle," The replacement Rolamee asked.

"Not exactly," Jones explained. "It's a reconnaissance mission. We're are there to observe the enemy not engage them. You are not to engage them unless ordered to it, is that clear?"

"Yes file leader!" The Elites shouted in unison waking their still sleeping brethren.

"Gear up and be in front of the command bunker in 30 minutes," Jones said walking out of the barracks again leaving the Elites to it. He walked to the armory to sign out his assault rifle and pistol.

"How's it going Vinny?" Jones asked as he walked up to the counter.

"My name isn't Vinny Sergeant Jones," Lance Corporal Leonardo said in a heavy Italian accent.

"I know," Jones said handing his ID over. Leonardo handed Jones his assault rifle and five magazines along with his pistol and three spare magazines for it.

"Sign here," Leonardo said handing Jones a clipboard. Jones scrawled his name across the bottom.

"I also need a radio pack and SRS sniper rifle for my recon mission," Jones said handing back the clipboard.

"The radio is pretty standard for a recon mission," Leonardo said raising an eyebrow. "But the sniper rifle?"

"I know you have at least three that aren't assigned to anyone," Jones said crossing his arms. "You'll get it back I promise."

"Very well," Leonardo said heavily. "Here fill out the request form." Leonardo handed Jones a piece of paper to fill out, while he did Leonardo went to get the weapon.

"Serial number?" Jones asked.

"SR...1745...8900," Leonardo said reading it from the side of the rifle. Jones handed Leonardo the form and he gave Jones the sniper rifle with four magazine of ammo. "Here's the radio and list of frequencies." In a effort to keep the enemy from listening in or homing in on their radio conversations they switched the frequencies they used daily. Jones tucked the magazines into his assault pack along with a day's worth of rations, poncho, sleeping mat and two canteens of water clipped to the outside. He swung the pack onto his back along with the sniper rifle.

"Thanks again Vinny," Jones said as he left the armory carrying the radio in his left hand with the list tucked safely inside.

"My name isn't Vinny!" Leonardo yelled after Jones. That brought a smirk to Jones's face as he walked towards the group of Elites by the command bunker. The Elites came to attention as one of them saw him approaching.

"Everybody ready?" Jones asked looking the group over.

"We are ready to proceed with the mission file leader," Mortumee reported.

"Nobody has to take a piss?" Jones ask eyeing Mortumee.

"No," Mortumee said a little unsure now.

"Good. Here take this," Jones said handing Mortumee the radio. "It goes on your back...both shoulders through the loops...no that one there and the other here...yes there you got it."

"What does this make me?" Mortumee said guessing(wisely) that he had been given an important role.

"You're my RO," Jones explained. "My radio operator you don't leave my side got it?"

"Yes file leader," Mortumee said coming to attention.

"The rest of you staggered column formation," Jones ordered. "Keep your spacing and keep it quiet. We have a long way to go so we'll take a break after the first hour. Let's move out." Jones walking towards the yellow diamond on his HUD. The formation walked for a better part of the hour the sun rising higher into the sky warming their backs. The terrain was mostly flat making for easy going and they hadn't seen anything remotely hostile. After an hour of marching Jones brought up a closed fist to signal the group to stop then lower it open palm to the ground. The Elites took the cue and laid on their stomachs disappearing from view.

"We're taking a 10 minute break," Jones said as he joined them. "Drink some water and take a piss if you need to." Jones pulled a canteen from his belt, unscrewed the cap and drank a good portion of it the cool water wetting his dry throat. Jones could feel the march getting to him, he could feel it in his legs and lower back. Jones looked at his Elites and if they felt any fatigue they showed no sign of it. Had he thought he was in shape had he really? Jones guessed they could march all day and still charge straight up a vertical cliff without slowing or hesitation. Jones glanced at his watch self petty would have to wait their 10 minutes were up. Jones capped his canteen again and stood up the Elites standing up with him. Jones rolled his arm forward and the group started forward again. It took them another hour and 42 minutes and one other break but Jones's HUD finely told them they were only a click(1000 meters) out. Jones stopped the formation and had them lay down again.

"Mortumee get up here," Jones said softly. Mortumee crawled up to Jones and lay at his right side.

"I'm present file leader," Mortumee said. Jones held a finger to his lips so he would be silent. He then picked up the radio's handset and held it to his ear.

"Night shade this is Snake bite over," Jones said into the handset.

"Go ahead Snake bite over," a voice said through the ear piece.

"We are a click away from Lion's den," Jones explained. "Requesting mission update over."

"Proceed with reconnaissance Night shade out." The voice said ending the conversation. Jones slowly got to his feet his muscles protesting and threaten to give out but they held as he righted himself. Jones lead his file in till he could see the river bubbling in its banks, he got down the Elites fallowing his lead Mortumee only inches from Jones. He could see the hills and the pass that Nosolee had informed him about but now they were only 800 meters away. Jones picked up the handset off of Mortumee's back again.

"Night shade this is Snake bite," Jones said. "We have reached Lion's den. Confirm you are receiving transmission over." Jones turned on his helmet recorder that was synced with his HUD so everything he saw, how he saw it would be how the higher ups saw it.

"Look up Snake bit," Night shade commanded. Jones did as instructed as he looked towards the sky. "Now back down," Night shade ordered.

Jones looked at the grass as it rustled in a light breeze. "Now pan left to right." Jones started to feel like they might be toying with him but did it anyway. "Good, signal coming in clear with minimal lag over." Jones brought his field glasses to his eyes to observe the pass between the hills.

"Looks like they are dug in there break," Jones said keying the handset with his free hand to give a report to go along with what they were seeing. "A manned checkpoint with reinforced barricades, bunkers and fox holes break," Jones moved his glasses up to the hills that over looked the pass. "As we feared more troops stationed on the hill tops break." The reason Jones was using break was to indicate that he wasn't done talking but was going to stop talking for a second. Along with changing the frequencies daily one was only supposed to speak on the radio for no longer then seven seconds(if it could be helped) to keep the enemy from tracing the signal.

"Looks like anti vehicles emplacements as well as machinegun nests break," Jones said lifting his finger off the button. He looked back at the pass. "My guess is only three light vehicles could fit through at a time two tanks max break...It's going to be a tough fight their position will let them see you coming a long ways off as well over."

"That was a good copy on both visual and audio Snake bite," Night shade said. "Proceed to second vantage point to recon bulk of enemy force over."

"Solid copying moving now," Jones said. "Will report once we're in position out." Jones placed the handset back on its hook on the radio still attached to Mortumee's back. Jones curdling his assault rifle in his arms began to crawl towards the tress 500 meters away. It was a long crawl but not the longest one he had every done, but he was exhausted from the march and this didn't help. When he got to the safety of the trees Jones slowly got to his feet his back begging him to lie back down, he pushed the pain out of his mind determined to finish the mission.

"Do you require another break?" Mortumee asked real concern breaking into his voice.

"Yes does our file leader, the mighty Specter, need a break?" Rolamee asked his mandibles twisted into a self satisfied smile. Jones looked at Rolamee wishing his head would explode.

"I'm fine," Jones said sharply. "Wedge formation stay quiet." Jones at the head of the formation, with Mortumee at his right side, he lead them through the trees fallowing the new yellow diamond that had replaced the old one on in his HUD. They moved through the forest at a good clip only slowing when they meet the river. Nosolee was right, it had narrowed and a tree had fallen in it acting as a dam the water only going up to Jones's mid thigh(to just below the Elites' knees). When everyone was across he had them form back into a wedge. They romped thought the forest in till they reached the edge of a tree line that had been cut back.

"Mortumee with me," Jones ordered. "The rest of you stay here and stay out of sight." Jones walked up to a large stump and knelt behind it bring his field glasses up. He plucked the handset off the radio again.

"Night shade this is Snake bite," Jones said speaking softly. "We are close to second position break...The Brutes have cut the forest back 100 meters from where it was break...Second position now exposed over."

"Roger we see that," Night shade said. "We'll have to make do over."

"Roger," Jones said peering through his field glasses. "Behind the hills roughly a click from our location is their main encampment break." Jones adjusted the glasses so they zoomed in. "Looks to be at battalion strength at least, with secondary defenses around their encampment break." Jones moved his field glasses to look at a small hill that was only roughly 250 meters out. "They have triple A positions on a hill near their main encampment break...Looks like Shade turrets and possibility some kind of suffice to air missiles over."

"Solid copy," Night shade said. "I need you to give a report on the approach and defenses of the hill with the triple A positions over."

"Roger," Jones said a little confused now. "The approach is very open however there are a lot of stumps and fallen trees that could be used as cover break...Maybe under the cover of darkness a platoon could sneak up on the hill without being noticed break...They have a shallow trench on the side of the hill itself, no getting past that without getting spotted break...Looks to only be about five Brutes in the trench and only a few more on the hill looks like crews for the triple A over."

"Copy all that," Night shade said. "Hold position until AAR(after action report) in 15 mikes(minutes, why they couldn't just say minutes over the radio always confused Jones) over."

"Copy that," Jones said. "Snake bite out." Jones had a bad feeling growing in the pit of his stomach.

"What do we do now file leader?" Mortumee asked.

"We eat," Jones said walking deeper into the forest where the rest of the Elites waited. "I know most of you haven't eaten breakfast so go ahead and eat whatever you brought. No fires." Jones took his assault pack off as he sat down leaning his back against a tree. Jones pulled out an MRE from his pack and after opening it started to heat the packet of spaghetti. The chemical heater started to lightly smoke as it heated his meal, he rested the packet against his boot as he watched the Elites produced their rations and sat down. He couldn't help but notice that Rolamee didn't have anything to eat.

"Didn't you bring any food Rolamee?" Jones asked taking the spaghetti packet out of the heating pouch shaking the condensation off of it.

"I did not think it would be required," Rolamee said a little down casted. "I assumed we would be back before I grew hungry." Jones slowly got to his feet and walked over to where Rolamee sat against his own tree.

"Here," Jones said holding out the warm packet of food.

"I couldn't," Rolamee protested looking at Jones truly sorry for what he had said earlier.

"It's spaghetti with meat sauce the best one," Jones said with a smile. "Trust me I know how much it sucks to march on an empty stomach."

"I have misjudged you file leader," Rolamnee said accepting the packet and plastic spoon.

"Think nothing of it. Here take this as well," Jones said as he handed him the MRE's spiced apples packet, crackers, and chocolate bar leaving Jones only the beverage powder and peanut butter. Rolamnee accepted it happily and tore open the spaghetti packet and dumped it into his mouth eating it all at once before turning to the apples. Jones went back to his tree and sat back down pulling his canteen off his belt. He separated the metal canteen cup, that the canteen was inside of, from the canteen and poured the powder in it mixing it with water from the canteen itself. Jones drank the liquid in one gulp tasting the vaguely orange tang of the drink powder, with the metallic tinge of the canteen cup and grittiness of the dirt that had found its way in from clawing on the ground. He then squeezed the peanut from the small packet into his mouth and chewed on it before he swallowed it. Jones had two other MREs but he thought he might need them later and with Rolamnee with no food of his own he would have to give most of it away. This was not the first time he had to field strip a MRE and the powder and peanut butter would do the best to curb his hunger.

"This is Night shade," Mortumee radio suddenly squawked. "Snake bite come in over." Jones stood up and walked the short distance to where he sat.

"Keep eating," Jones said before he picked up the radio's handset and keying it. "Snake bit here go ahead."

"Are you the squad leader? Over." Night shade asked.

"Yes over," Jones said. There was a pause then a new voice came over the radio.

"This is Colonel McKay the leader of human ground forces do you know who I am? Over," McKay asked. Jones smiled to himself the Colonel must have thought him an Elite as well.

"Yes sir I do over," Jones said.

"Alright here's the sit rep," McKay said. "We are going to launch an assault on the Brute's encampment so they don't have a moment to breath. Do you understand so far over?"

"I do sir over," Jones said rubbing his temple with his free hand.

"We need you to take out the anti air positions on the hill near their camp," McKay explained. "Once you do will smash their outer defenses with air strikes and then roll right through them with armor. You will have to hold your position after you destroy their

anti air until the armor breaks through. Questions over?"

"Two sir," Jones said. "We were on a recon mission so we're lightly equipped."

"I have an air drop on rout to the forest as we speak over," McKay interrupted.

"Outstanding sir," Jones said. "The second is things could get very hot very quickly do we have any kind of support until the armor breaks through?"

"I'll reassign the Pelicans, after their strikes, to you to provide close air support," McKay said coolly. "Well that be proficient over?"

"Very good sir," Jones said a little worried at the Colonel's tone of voice.

"Hit them at 0600 sharp tomorrow," MacKay said. "Just as dawn is breaking. The air drop is roughly 10 mikes out. McKay out." Just as quickly as the conversation had started it was over. Jones couldn't believe how he had told Jones they were spending the night there without directly telling them. Jones turned to face the Elites who had been listening intently and were waiting for Jones to tell them what was happening.

"You're all in luck," Jones said. "Looks like there will be a battle after all." The Elites jumped to their feet.

"Tell us what you require of us file leader," Mortumee said.

15. Thunder and Lightening

I apologize for the delay for this chapter but last week I was called up for snow recovery. Normally the MPs handle that but who am I to question their methods? This is a rather long chapter for your reading pleasure, so I hope that makes up for it.

Jones turned his wrist to look at his watch, it told him it had been nearly 30 minutes since he had gotten off the radio with Colonel McKay and still no air drop. Jones had most of his Elites setting up their sleeping arrangement for the night to come, while two watched the Brutes to ensure they weren't discovered. Jones walked up to the two Elites laying on the ground next to a fallen tree observing the Brutes with a monocular and knelt next to them.

"Fulsamee, Ikaporamee take a break your shifts are over," Jones said.

"As you wish file leader," Fulsamee said as he stood up and went back to work on his lean-to Jones had showed them how to make out of large sticks and leaves.

"Rolamnee, Barinee take their places," Jones ordered.

"As you request file leader," Rolamnee said laying down with Barinee near the log. Jones walked back to his own lean-to(his poncho strung up between two trees) and made sure his assault pack would be dry if

it rained. A blinking blue diamond appeared in Jones HUD indicating that the supple drop had been made, that is was due east of their position and it was a mile out. Jones sighed heavily as he rubbed the sore spot on his back.

"Alright," Jones said turning to face the Elites. "The supply drop is a mile from here all of you with me expect Rolamnee and Barinee. I need you to stay and watch the Brutes let us know if you even think they have discovered us."

"Of course file leader," Barinee said not taking his eyes off of the Brutes.

"The rest of you with me single file formation," Jones said as he lead his Elites to a small clearing where several drop pods were partly embedded into the ground. Jones pried the first one open and several energy cells for the Covenant's carbines fell to the ground. Without waiting for an order Ikaporamee started picking them up and placed them into a sack. Jones opened the rest of them to see what else the UNSC had given them. As it turned out a LMG with plenty of ammo cans, a M41 launcher with two reloads, a box of fragmentation grenade, medical supplies, eight timed satchel charges and five entrenching tools. Jones was happy he was in charge of Elites, if he was a normal squad leader the ten human marines would never had made it back with the supplies in one trip but Jones and his Elites did.

"Just set it down anywhere we have work to do," Jones said as he picked up one of the E-tools and unfolded it turning it into a shovel. "Alright gather around and listen up I'm going to explain how to dig a hasty fighting position and our line." The Elites encircled Jones and actually look interested as Jones explained a hasty fighting position was a hole dug in the ground as long as the person using it and only deep enough to cover them as they laid down in it. Jones then handed out the six E-tools (he threw in his personal one) and showed them where he wanted them. The rest that didn't have E-tools Jones had them gather logs, that no human would have been able to move without machinery, to place in front of their line and build a machinegun nest. Jones even went so far as to have the Elites dump the dirt they had removed for the fighting positions in front of the logs further increasing their defensive value. Jones even had them cut notches into the logs to rest their carbines on.

"How are we doing?" Jones asked as he knelt next to Ikaporamee behind the chest high (Jones's chest) U made out of logs as he neatly stacked the ammo cans for the LMG.

"My task is almost complete file leader," Ikaporamee said standing to his full height.

"You know how to work one of these?" Jones asked resting a hand on the LMG stuck on top of the logs in the middle of the U.

"I apologize file leader I do not have sufficient knowledge of human weaponry to operate it," Ikaporamee said dropping his gaze to the ground.

"I didn't expect you to, now come over here," Jones said pointing to the LMG as Ikaporamee knelt next to Jones. "The first then you do is lock the bolt to the rear by grabbing the handle here and pulling it

back and then pushing it forward. Next you push these two buttons in and pull up to raise the hatch. Then you take the belt and place it here on the feed tray lining up the first round with the chamber. Finally you close the hatch and give it a little hit to make sure it locked, flip off the safety and you're ready to fire. Now you have to do that every time your belt runs dry got it?"

"Yes file leader," Ikaporamee said. "How do I aim and fire this weapon?"

"Right," Jones said. "Please the stock tightly into your shoulder and then you have to line up the rear sight with the front sight and just pull the trigger. Nothing to it." Jones slapped Ikaporamee on the back before he went to find Mortumee. He found him still digging carefully and neatly pouring the dirt in front of the log in front of his hasty fighting position.

"Greetings file leader," He said as Jones approached.

"You doing alright Mortumee?" Jones asked.

"Of course file leader," He said putting down his E-tool to look at Jones.

"Can you fire one of these?" Jones asked picking up the sniper rifle that had been left near Mortumee's position.

"I do but I have never aimed or fired one before," Mortumee explained.

"It's idiot poof," Jones explained. "You simply put the crosshair on the head of someone you don't like wait for it to turn red and pull the trigger. Now if you were actually sniping I would be a little concerned but you'll just be covering us."

"I won't fail you," Mortumee said bowing slightly.

"Good now get back to work," Jones said standing back up. It took them the rest of the day but they had finished their line just as the sun was starting to go down. The line stretched along the tree line only 15 feet from the clearing and the Brutes beyond. The logs and dirt would act as a barrier while the Elites would be firing with most of them below ground level. Extra ammo for their carbines had been placed in the hasty fighting positions as well as on their persons and even frag grenades had be passed out and placed next to the ammo. Jones had decided to take a risk and pulled the two on watch and had everyone behind the line near their lean-tos so they could eat. He figured with the approaching darkness and the Brute hadn't found them already they wouldn't find them in half an hour while they ate.

Jones removed his second MRE, buffalo chicken, and heated the chicken packet and fried rice side dish before giving them to Rolamnee. Along with the chocolate pudding and wheat snack bread. Jones kept the ranger power bar and the lemon lime drink mix. He ate and drank them quickly and his stomach grumbled demanding more food, he was determined to save his last MRE just in case however. When they had finished eating, the sun was behind the horizon but still gave off a little bit of light.

"Alright here's the plan for tomorrow," Jones said drinking the last of his second canteen. "I'll take Rolamnee, Barinee and Fulsamee. We'll creep our way, under cover of darkness, to the fallen tree just in front of the Brute trench on the side of the hill. While throw grenades into it and after they go off we'll charge the hill covered by Mortumee and his sniper rifle. We are going to plant the charges on their anti air defenses and get the hell back to the line covered but the rest of you still here."

"We are running from a perfectly good fight?" Rolamnee asked crossing his arms.

"Not running," Jones explained with a smile. "I didn't have you break your backs building this line and not use it. If we try and hold that hill the Brutes will have a easier time to get to us. When we run back to the line the Brutes will fallow thinking us retreating and we will kill them all behind our line where we have the advantage. We will be able to kill more of them easier from behind our line." Rolamnee didn't say anything but nodded his approval. "Ok," Jones said. "I'll make the fire watch roster: two on duty at all times one hour shifts. The rest of you get some sleep." After he made the roster Jones took his own advice and laid down under his poncho using his assault pack as a pillow and went to sleep. When he did he dreamed of home for the first time since he was in basic training.

He was 17 again sitting down at the kitchen table with both his parents but they weren't his parents they were Sangheili. But yet he knew them as both his parents and nothing seemed to alarm him. His mother took his plate of almost eaten pancakes away for him before she kissed him on the forehead. Jones being 17 jerked his head back and rubbed the spot where she had kissed it. His mother smiled her mandibles twisted up Jones smiled back seeing nothing odd.

"You betty hurry or you'll be late for school boy," His father said looking up from his news paper in that deep Sangheili voice.

"Of course dad," Jones said standing up and grabbing his backpack. He hugged his father just before he ran out the door. Outside waiting for him was his two friends since elementary school George and Zack but they were also Sangheili.

"Lets go Allen," Zack said rising his hand. Jones ran to catch up with them as they walked to school. Everyone he had known had become a Sangheili but he was ok with that in fact it seemed normal to him. This was the first pleasant dream he had in a long time or least until George turned to him.

"File leader," he said in a harsh whisper.

"What did you say?" Jones asked stopping dead in his tracks.

"I said: file leader it's time to wake up," George said grabbing Jones and shaking him. Jones snapped awake them staring into the face of Barinee.

"I'm up," Jones said getting to his feet.

"According to the roaster made by you it's time for your shift," Barinee explained standing up again. "I couldn't find the name for

your partner and all of us has gone at least once. So who is your partner?"

"Go to sleep," Jones looked at his watch it was 0300 he would be waking them up at 0545 to prepare for the assault. "You have a little under three hours of sleep yet to get." To ensure his troops were well rested he only gave them one hour shift while he took what remained on the last shift.

"As you wish file leader," Barinee said laying down under his lean-to. Jones grabbed all eight satchel charges and sat down behind the U that made up the machinegun nest. He used his field glasses's NV sighting to check the Brutes to see no change in their behavior. Satisfied Jones went to work setting and arming the satchel charges so the Elites only had to remove the key to start the countdown.

"Mind if I join you file leader," Mortumee asked sitting next to Jones.

"Not at all," Jones said putting down a satchel charge. "Shouldn't you be asleep?" Jones asked.

"That is one of the things I wish to discuss," Mortumee said resting his back on the logs.

"What?" Jones said setting up alarmed. "Are you and the others not getting enough?"

"Not at all file leader," Mortumee explained. "On the contrary in fact. I'm concerned about you file leader. You starve yourself to feed Rolamnee, he who didn't bring his own rations out of stubbornness. Then you deprive yourself of sleep just to ensure we get a few more hours. I would just like to ask why?" Jones looked at the ground for awhile before answering.

"A good NCO makes sure his men, or uh troops are taken care of before himself," Jones explained. "It's our job to make sure they're ready for battle so the officers only have to give us an objective and we get it done."

"I see but if a NCO is too exhausted or malnourished to lead his rested and well feed troops?" Mortumee asked looking Jones in the eye.

"Go to bed Mortumee," Jones said a little harsher then they wanted to.

"As you wish file leader," Mortumee said standing up bring his fest to his shoulder and bowing. Jones watched him until the dark of the night swallowed him. Sighing Jones went back to the satchel charges. The two hours passed very slowly for Jones as he tried to kept himself await by checking the LMG and observing the Brutes. At exactly 0545 Jones stood up, his knees and legs weak, to wake his Elites to find them already suited up and ready to go walking towards the machinegun nest.

"Alright Ikaporamee take over your machinegun, Mortumee garb the sniper rifle and head to your fighting position. Once those grenades go off the Brutes at the top of the hill are going to poke their

heads over, blow them off. The rest of you not coming with me get to your positions and cover our retreat. Rolamnee, Barinee, Fulsamee here take these." Jones handed them two frag grenades each.

"Why do we need these we have our own grenades?" Rolamnee asked clipping them to his combat harness.

"Your grenades glow a bright blue that will give us away to the enemy," Jones explained. "Now when I key my radio threw one grenade into the trench once all four go off we storm the trench. Throw the other one on top of the hill once they go off charge the hill top and kill any that remain." Jones passed out the satchel charges two to each including himself. "Arm them by removing this key and place them on their anti air equipment. Questions?" The Elites held their peace as they double checked their carbines.

Jones nodded and lead the three Elites to the tree line before going prone and crawling to the fallen tree just in front of the Brutes trench. They were close enough to hear the apes heavy breathing. He used hand signals to get them to spread out and get ready. Jones looked at his watch it told him it was 0558, Jones pulled a grenade off his belt and held it in his hand. There was little he could do but wait as the first rays of gray light started to show themselves. Right when his watch changed from 055959 to 060000 Jones keyed his mike and released it. He could hear pins being pulled and pulled the pin on his own grenade.

Of all the positions to throw grenades from the prone was the most difficult. He threw it as hard as he could the spoon flying off in the air officially arming the grenade. It managed to make it into the trench with the three others and Jones cover his head as they went off. There was four load thumps as dirt and bloody limbs flew up from the trench with cries of pain and surprise. Jones jumped to his feet and rushed across the short distance and jumped into the trench his was still the last one as Fulsamee and Barinee had already thrown their second grenades. He armed his second grenade and looked up to see a Brute at the top of the hill and looking down at him. Jones heard the report of a SRS sniper rifle and the Brute flopped backwards just as the grenade left his hand. It went off and it was the last one thrown so Jones gave the order.

"Charge!" He shouted running up the hill the last one to reach the top again. The unaware and confused Brutes there were already slaughtered by the Elites but Jones could see more already pouring out of the encampment's tents trying to figure out what was happening, a few were even running at the hill.

"Plant the charges," Jones said a little out of breath from the run up the hill (and the march lack of sleep and food). Jones himself armed a charge and placed it under a Shade, he placed the second one on the SAM turret pulling the key out and starting the 30 second count down.

"All charges set and armed," Fulsamee reported.

"Fall back get to the fucking line!" Jones shouted running back down the hill and towards the tree line the Elites in toe. Meanwhile a pair of Brutes had made it to the top of the hill saw the retreating Elites and opened fire. The first of the charges went off before they could take the time for aimed shots. Jones was the last one to

make it back to the line and quickly jumped into his ditch next to Mortumee's.

"Nice shooting," Jones said yanking the handset from the radio that he still wore on his back.

"Thank you file leader," Mortumee said.

"Eyes open they'll be coming for us," Jones said before speaking into the handset. " Night shade this is Snake bite their triple A is down over."

"Roger that Snake bite," Night shade said via radio. "Hold position until armor breaks through out."

High about the battle two Pelicans call sign Lightening were circling waiting for the order.

"Lightening, Night shade you are a-go for gun run out," Night shade said sharply his voice coming through their helmet speakers.

"They sure are in a pissy mode today," The pilot said to his co-pilot as he lined up his craft with the left hill overlooking the pass. His wing man lining up for a run at the right hill.

"Arm rocket pods A and C and give me a firing solution, lets blow the top off that fucking hill," The pilot told his co-pilot. The co-pilot flipped the covers up for the two arming switches and flipped them as well. The targeting computer came online then and hallow red diamonds appeared on top of the hill some even moved as they tracked their targets.

"Line 'em up," The co-pilot said pleased with himself.

"Knock 'em down," The pilot said just as pleased pulling the trigger on his yoke sending a volley of rockets and a hail of bullets from his chaingun screaming at the hill top. The rockets slammed into the Brute's position already peppered by the high caliber rounds. The pilot only eased off once they were only 150 meters out and pulled up so they would pass right over top of them. When they did the co-pilot dropped two dumb bombs on the hill top to ensure any survivors were dealt with. The pilot looked to his right to see his wing man had completed his run as well. They both made large lazy circles and hit the Brute line guarding the pass from behind, the pilot in the first Pelican keyed his radio.

"Thunder this is Lightening gate is smashed time to roll on through over," The pilot said into his helmet mike speaking to the armor column idling just out of sight and range of the Brutes.

"Roger we're bring the hammer down out," Caption Hoff said in charge of the armor column.

"Night shade, Lightening here run complete ready for retasking over," The pilot said the sun rising even higher more light spilling over the horizon.

"Roger Lightening you're being reassigned to provide close air support for Snake bite," Night shade explained. "They are behind enemy lines we can only guess at their position you have to get in

contact with them to found their exact location over." A yellow diamond appear in the Pelican's view showing the rough location of Jones and his Elites.

"Solid copy on all that out," The pilot said banking his craft heading towards the diamond his wing man in toe. "Snake bit this Lightening do you copy?" The pilot heard nothing back static for several seconds as he neared the diamond. "Snake bite this is Lightening do you read over?" There was a second of static then a frantic voice broke through.

"Snake bit, go ahead Lightening over!" Jones shouted his voice mixed with the sounds of battle.

"We're here to provide close air support mark your location over," The pilot explained in a calm voice but his heart started to beat a little faster.

"Roger!" Jones shouted the battle sounded as though it had intensified. There was a few seconds of silence then: "Friendly position marked by both smoke and IR strobe over!"

"Roger we see it coming in hot out," The pilot said as a blinking green circle appeared in the tree line the plasma fire erupted from. There was also enough light so he could see a twisting column of green smoke rising from the same spot of trees.

Brute encampment after the Elites raid on the hill before the satchel charges **detonation.**

The encampment was on full alert as they scrambled to gather weapons and tried to figure out what was going on. The Brute chieftain in command of the entire camp stood in the middle of the encampment near his tent watching his warriors scramble trying to find something to shoot. An explosion in the distance caused his head to snap in that direction. A sneer came to his features as he growled in his throat as he watched debris rain down on the hill top as several Brutes skidded down the other side knocked back from the explosion. He retrieved his gravity hammer from the tent and set off at a determined pace to deal with whomever had attack his camp. He had made it through the untidy cluster of tents when the two hill tops exploded. His head snapped to that explosion as well the sneer widening and the growl raising in pitch. A minor Brute ran up to him them.

"Scouts report a mass of human armor just on the other side of the hills," He explained in a hurry. "They used aircraft to destroy our front line there is nothing between us and them!" The chieftain's growl continued to raise in pitch until he looked up at the sky the growl becoming a blood curdling roar.

"Our air defense?" The chieftain demanded of the minor.

"Destroyed in the raid by a group of Sangheili," The minor Brute said swallowing hard. The chieftain stared at the minor coldly gripping his gravity hammer with a death grip as he ground his teeth. "They ran back to the trees like cowards." The minor added quickly feeling like the chieftain might bring the hammer down on his head(which he did want to). Instead he used it to first point at the minor then at the trees past the hill where their anti air battery stood just

moments before.

"Take as many warriors as you need, I don't care how many it takes, I want those cold slimy, cowardice bastards dead before this battle is over," The chieftain said through gritted teeth. "I don't care if you have to take an entire clan, if nothing else they are all going to die." With his will pressed onto the minor Brute the chieftain left to grab warriors of his own to deal with the humans assaulting them from the front. The minor Brute started grabbing Brutes left and right sending them over the hill to deal with the Sangheili while he gathered a pack to lead an assault as Brutes trickled at Jones's position and then flooded.

Back safely behind the line and in his hasty fighting position next to Mortumee's Jones fired at the Brutes cresting the hill and running at them while Mortumee picked them off with his sniper rifle. The sun was raising higher into the sky making them easy to see and easier to hit for they just ran at their line drunk with blood lust. Ikaporamee opened up with the LMG from the MG nest in the middle of their line hammering the Brutes as the lack of cover left them exposed. The rest of Elites fired their carbines taking them down with precision, while the Brutes on the other hand fired wildly into the trees most of their shots not even coming close, the ones that did harmlessly impacted the ground or the dirt and logs that made up the wall of their front line. They didn't stop and they never slowed as they charged Jones and his Elites and they could barely keep up as some Brutes started making it to fallen trees and stumps taking cover and firing back with more accuracy and still more were coming over the hill. Mortumee's radio squawked to life then.

"Snake bit this Lightening do you copy?" The pilot's calm voice coming over the handset's ear piece. Jones didn't hear it as he fired a lengthy burst from his assault rifle, nor did Mortumee as he fired the last two rounds for the sniper rifle. He switch to his carbine and resumed firing as Jones reloaded his assault rifle the pilot choosing that moment to try again.

"Snake bite this is Lightening do you read over?" The pilot said a little concern entering his voice. Jones snatched the handset from Mortumee's back bring it to his right ear and plugged his left ear with his left hand so he could hear.

"Snake bit, go ahead Lightening over!" Jones shouted barley able to hear himself over the fighting.

"We're here to provide close air support mark your location over," The pilot said still calmly it would have gotten on Jones's nerves if he wasn't busy at the moment.

"Roger!" Jones shouted just before he tossed the handset to the side. Staying in the prone position Jones frantically looked in his assault pack he had taken off after he had gotten back. He pulled out a smoke grenade with a green strip around it and a device that looked like a grenade but small and slimmer, with a button instead of a pin. He pushed the button and threw the device near the MG nest along with the smoke grenade Jones snatched the handset back up. "Friendly position marked by both smoke and IR strobe over!" Jones shouted as even more Brutes showed up cresting the hill.

"Roger we see it coming in hot out," The pilot said still too fucking

calmly for Jones who had casted the handset aside firing his assault rifle again as the column of green smoke rose into the brightening sky. Jones watched as the Pelicans' chaingun rounds kicked up dirt as they cut across the Brutes' positions. Jones then saw the Pelicans themselves pass by and bank for another pass at the Brutes this time each of them fired two rockets killing all the Brutes that had reached cover and most of the ones coming down the hill. Still they did not slow as a seemingly endless number of them crested the hill and charged at Jones, but the Pelicans were taking the blunt of the burden. Jones ordered a cease fire in fact as the Pelicans mowed the Brutes down leaving Jones's squad no clear targets.

The pilot of Lightening one banked his craft into a better position and used his chaingun to hose a group of Brutes with metal slugs. He moved again to avoid a volley of grenades fired from what the UNSC enlisted had dubbed the Brute shot.

"This is what we call a target rich environment," The pilot told his co-pilot referring to the large number of moving red diamonds as they highlighted enemies. There were so many the computer couldn't track them all. The pilot didn't mind really they weren't trying to hide from him and they didn't have any anti air he had to avoid. What small arms fire they did send his way he could dodge easily and if he didn't it would take a lot to crack his craft's armor.

"Lightening this is Night shade do you copy over?" Night shade asked something odd about his voice. The pilot thought it might be sadness or maybe regret but he couldn't nail it down.

"Go ahead Night shade over," The pilot said. As he fired a rocket and scattering a group of Brutes cluster on the hill top trying to see if they could fire a damaged Shade in a last ditch effort to shoot down the Pelicans.

"You being reassigned to provide overwatch for the convoy over," Night shade said slowly and a little quietly. The pilot had it then it was sorrow in his voice.

"Please verify," The pilot said. "Things are hot in our AO if we leave now a major shit storm we be heading for Snake bit over."

"That is understood but your orders remain break contact and provide overwatch for Thunder over," Night shade said tonelessly.

"Do you understand?" The pilot demanded a little anger entering his normally calm voice. "If we leave Snake bite won't be able to hold and they can't break contact... over."

"This comes down from the top!" Night shade said also a little anger coming into his voice. "I say again your orders are to break contact and provide overwatch or you will be brought up on insubordination! Over."

"Solid copy will comply out," The pilot said with a sigh.

Jones was watching the sun rise higher into the sky casting its yellow rays over everything when he got the news.

"Snake bit, this is Lightening," Mortumee's radio squawked. Jones

picked up the handset and press it to his ear.

"Go ahead Lightening," Jones said his voice calm and his spirit lighter now.

"We have been reassigned to protect the main assault and are leaving your AO," The pilot said his voice toneless. "I say again we are leaving your AO to provide overwatch for Thunder...sorry. Out." Jones watched with chilled blood as the two Pelicans flew off leaving them without air support. Jones keyed his helmet mike.

"We lost our air support," Jones almost shouted. "Get ready they'll be hitting us hard again." As if waiting for that the Brutes who had come to a halt at the hill top to fire at the Pelicans charged them again. This time it was worse because it wasn't a trickle or stream of Brutes it was a massive surge, as all the Brutes that had collected and got pinned down at the hill top rushed forward unchallenged. Jones's line opened up kill several but most were making it to cover not too far from them and hosed them with fire. Jones couldn't reload fast enough as for every Brute he killed three would take his place. The only thing keeping them from overrunning them was Ikaporamee and his LMG or it was until it stopped fire suddenly.

"File leader," Ikaporamee's voice coming through Jones's ear piece.
"The weapon has ceased to fire."

"You remember how to cycle the bolt?" Jones asked as he slammed a fresh magazine into his assault rifle and resumed firing. "Do that, pull pack on the handle and push forward then try to fire."

"Roger file leader," Ikaporamee said Jones hearing the distinct click-crack of the LMG's bolt being cycled. There was a throaty roar from the crew serve as it fired a burst then it cut out again. There was a pause, roughly as long as it takes to cycle the bolt, then it fired another short burst before cutting out again. Another short pause but this time only a single round shot from the LMG, there was a longer pause then Ikaporamee spoke again.

"File leader," He began but Jones cut him off.

"Yeah I got it," Jones said moving to a crouching position. "Hang on I'm heading to you now." Then turning to Mortumee. "Cover me I going to make a run for the MG nest!"

"I have you covered," Mortumee said as he fired his carbine. Jones threw a grenade just before he sprinted for the machinegun nest to give himself cover as well. Rounds fly past Jones as he ran his feet barely touching the ground and there were some close calls but he made it sliding behind the logs. Panting heavily Jones looked the MG over and saw the problem right away smoke poured from the end of the barrel as well as the breaches where the rounds were fed and ejected from.

"Where is the second barrel?" Jones asked Ikaporamee as he ducked back behind the logs to reload his carbine.

"Everything for that weapon I placed there," He said pointing at the ammo cans. Jones couldn't believe it McKay had given them a LMG and over 3000 rounds but only one barrel, they hadn't even gave them any

gun oil to cool or clean the barrel.

"I think I can get it working but you have to cover me!" Jones shouted as spikes flew over their heads as well as impaled the logs.

"That I can accomplish," Ikaporamee said raising up and firing again. Jones ran in a half crouch to the LMG and opened the hatch removing the unfinished belt letting it fall to the ground. He then ripped the pouch containing his personal cleaning kit from his belt and dumped its contents on the ground. He snatched up collapsible rod and screwed the bore bush to the end of it soaking it with the multi-purpose solvent and oil solution. The LMG was chamber to fire the same caliber of round as his assault rifle so it was a perfect fit as he jammed it into the barrel starting from the breach. There was a hiss as the liquid rapidly cooled the heated metal a glop of black carbon forced out of the end of the barrel by the brush. Jones retracted the cleaning rod tossed it aside as he used a rag to clean the star chamber freeing a massive clump of carbon. The last thing he did was wipe the feed tray clear of carbon and oil before he reseated the belt of ammunition. He slammed the hatched down and bent over opening a ammo can and linked the new belt with the almost used one.

Five of the six spikes hit Jones squarely in the back forcing him to fall forward that change in position is what caused the sixth one to hit him in the right shoulder. His back and chest was where the thickest armor was and the range from which the Brute had fired had been at his weapon's maximum effective range. The back plate managed to stop the spikes for killing him but not enough to keep the tips from piercing his skin causing him pain. However the plate that covered his shoulder was much thinner and the spike went clean through, opening up his old wound caused by Lieutenant Jenkins and was only stopped by the ground. Jones slammed into the ground the impact caused him to bite the tip of his tongue.

"What the fuck," Jones grunted spitting blood as it followed from his tongue and filling up his mouth. "I thought you had me covered Ikaporamee." He said as he turned staying on his stomach, coming face to face with Ikaporamee. He was laying on his back however blood following from his open mouth caused by the several spikes sticking out of his stomach and chest. His lifeless eyes starred right at Jones as he pounded the ground with his fist causing pain in his right shoulder. "Goddamn it!" Jones shouted as he crawled to the logs and peeked over eyeing the Brute as he reloaded his spiker. It seemed without the LMG's fire to hose them the Brutes had managed to advance closer to the line. Jones rose up and placing the LMG's stock to his left shoulder, for his right one was in no condition, he fired the now working LMG at the Brute his body shaking from the rounds' impacts. Jones turned his head to look at Rolamnee and Barinee firing behind a barrier of logs and dirt.

"Rolamnee get over here!" Jones ordered. Rolamnee stood up and sprinted towards Jones ducking his head slightly. Seeing Rolamnee break from cover a Brute hiding behind a tree wheeled around the other side and leveled his Brute shot at him. Jones saw the Brute and swung the LMG to engage him firing before he was on target. The Brute ducked back behind the thick tree putting it between himself and Jones the rounds stopped by the thick wood. Jones kept firing however hoping to keep the Brute behind the tree but he had other plans as he

moved to the other side keeping most of the tree between them he fired at the position where Rolamnee had sprinted from. Jones watched as the exploding rounds kicked up dirt, splintered wood and purple blood as Barinee was blown apart. The Brute duck fully behind the tree again putting another belt of grenades into his weapon. Reloaded the Brute jumped out meaning to get Rolamnee just before he reached Jones but he was ready for him, the LMG's heavy rounds ripped through his body. Rolamnee reached Jones just as he eased off the trigger after he had killed the stubborn Brute.

"What do you require file leader?" Rolamnee asked crouching behind the logs and firing from the new position.

"Take over the gun!" Jones ordered stepping aside so he could get to it. "Fire it in burst. Ok I'm going to make a run for Mortumee and the radio cover me!" Clasping his left hand to his right shoulder Jones prepared to run back to his position.

"File leader your weapon," Rolamnee said pointing to Jones's assault rifle laying on the ground. Jones pick it up and slung it across his back the spikes there preventing it from laying flat. Jones took off running then hand clasped to his shoulder and had almost made it when the Brute popped up from behind a fallen tree. Jones saw him knew he was dead and decided to keep running to see how far he could get. The Brute was armed with mauler, the range was too great for his weapon but that didn't stop him from firing at the running human. The chunks of metal the weapon had fired spread out very quickly and slowed just as quickly but they still drew blood as they hit the side of Jones's face and ripped his uniform. A chunk embedded itself just above his eye where he might have put a piercing if he was in to such things. Jones dove to the ground landing in the pit he had dug next to Mortumee who was still firing away with his carbine.

Unable to fire his rifle one handed Jones drew his pistol and stood up facing the Brute that had fired on him as he reloaded his mauler. Jones drew a bead on him and fired his pistol left handed at him, because this was his weak hand most of the rounds missed but a handful hit forcing the Brute to duck down behind cover. His pistol dry Jones ejected the empty magazine and placed it under his right arm pit freeing up his left hand so he could grab a new magazine from his hip holster. He had managed to get it into the pistol's grip and pointed it down range when the Brute reappeared. Jones hit the slide release as he took aim as the Brute aimed at him. They opened fire at the same time Jones managed to get enough hits to drop the bastard but not before getting even more cut up. Blood streamed down his face from the multiple cuts and he spat more blood out as it also followed from his tongue. Jones laid back down next to Mortumee everything aching, his face stinging and feeling light headed. Out of options he snatched the handset from the hook on the radio and pressed it to his ear. Spitting out a mouthful of blood Jones keyed the handset.

"This is Snake bit location marked by IR strobe!" Jones shouted letting all of his anger and frustration enter his voice. "Skyfall! I say again Skyfall!" Jones let the handset slip out of his hand and rose up to a crouch and fired his pistol randomly in the direction of the Brutes.

Skyfall was the code word used if a friendly unit was in danger of being overrun. Any and all able nearby units are supposed to respond coming to their aid. Since that is the case it is not to be invoked

lightly and there almost is always an investigation after its use.

The pilot of Lightening one was circle above the Brute encampment gunning down a Brute or two but the convoy didn't really need air cover as the armor rolled through and the infantry mopped up behind them. When the pilot heard Snake bit's Skyfall he wasted no time in turning his craft towards the still flashing blue diamond and gunned the engine. The number of red diamonds had damn near tripled and were much closer to the blue diamond. The pilot checked his ammo: he had 743 rounds for the chaingun, 17 rockets and one dumb bomb left. He started with the Brutes nearest Jones's line and worked back his wing man doing the opposite. Captain Hoff had dispatched three Scorpions, five warthogs and a platoons worth of infantry to respond to the Skyfall. The Warthogs and infantry charged up the hill where the Brutes been pouring from cutting off their retreat. The rest of the main assault force had broken through then and had stopped them from sending anymore at Jones as the Scorpions went around the hill and hit the Brutes assaulting Jones in their flanks.

After three more minutes it was all over the Pelicans have expending all their ammunition had left to rearm leaving only the human ground forces setting just outside the tree line waiting to see what would happen. They waited for two minutes and when nothing happen and no radio contact was made a squad of marines was sent forward to investigate. As they neared the tree line the four survivors of the original 11 emerged provoking gasps from the humans. All of them were wounded in one way or another and they limped at different speeds. The fasted was Rolamnee as he only received grazes from a few spikes his shields deflecting most of the attacks. He had Fulsamee's arm around him as he helped him walk the spike in his thigh making it hard to walk. The least wounded was Mortumee as he had only been hit with wood splinters caused by explosions. He care the most severely wounded and only human member of the file: Jones. Jones could barely walk and was close to passing out when Mortumee handed him over to the marine medics with the spikes still in his back.

"Sergeant can you hear me?" One of them asked as he shined a light into his eyes as the other wiped the caked on blood from his face.

"My men, you have to take care of my men," Jones mumbled weakly.

"Don't worry they are being treated now," The medic reassured as he removed Jones's chest and back plate removing the spikes from his back. They eased him onto a stretcher and loaded him on to a Pelican with Rolamnee, Fulsamee and Mortumee to be taken to the Silent Dawn for immediate treatment. As the hatch closed and the craft rose into the sky one of the medics placed an IV into Jones's left arm, while the other went to treat Fulsamee's wounded leg.

"My men," Jones muttered just before he lost consciousness.

16. Recovery

Jones awoke groggily to the overly bright overhead lights of the Silent dawn's medical bay. Jones brought his right hand up to shield his eyes, hissing in pain as his shoulder protested. He

quickly shoot his arm back down to relieve the pain, with the pain gone he found his throat dryer then sand paper and reached to his belt to retrieve his canteen. Instead his hand touched the thin fabric of the medical scrubs the medics and doctors had changed him into. Now fully aware of where he was Jones slowly sat up careful propping himself up on his hands and looked around. The bay was empty expect for him and the only noise he heard was the steady beeping of his heart rate monitor. Carefully and slowly he swung his legs over the side of the rather soft bed and placed his bare feet on the cold deck. His muscles protesting and his bones cracking he managed to stand and then sway unsteadily on his feet for a few seconds. Jones managed to steady himself and hobbled to the bathroom where he gripped the edges of the sink to keep from falling over.

He looked himself over in the mirror above the sink, his already scared face was covered in cuts and gashes, themselves covered with a medicated film to help them heal. He carefully used his left hand to pull the collar of his scrub top to look at his right shoulder. A large dressing covered it and against his better judgment he peeled a corner up to look at the wound. They had filled the hole with biofoam to speed up the healing process, how he maintained motor function in his right arm was beyond him. He felt rather then saw the dressings that covered the holes the spikes had made in his back. He turned on the cold water and let in follow into his cupped hand before bringing it to his mouth the water soothing his dry throat. His thirst quenched he turned the water off and straighten back up.

"Aren't you a lucky bastard," He said to his own reflection before barely making it back to his bed. He had just closed his eyes to drift back to sleep when a cheerful and booming voice echoed through the medical bay.

"File leader you are awake," The voice said forcing Jones to snap his eyes open. Jones sat up quickly a bolt of pain shooting through his shoulder. Jones saw Putumee wearing a set of scrubs that were too small for him the shirt only going to his biceps and the pants just above his knees. He was sitting in a wheelchair and hurried to wheel himself to the foot of Jones's bed. _

_ "Juses how bad is it?" Jones asked in a surprised gasp. Putumee looked at him with confusion and then understanding as he knew what Jones had meant._

_ "I am fine file leader," Putumee explained getting to his feet to prove it. "I found this device in the corridors and found it to be extraordinarily entertaining." He sat back down in the wheelchair his knees bent up, due to his size, almost touching his chest. He then leaned back balancing the chair and himself on the two larger back wheels only. That got a hearty laugh from Jones until he started to cough._

_ "Well I'm glad you're ok," Jones managed with a smile._

_ "As am I," Putumee said placing all four wheels on the ground again. "I heard you had a few brushes with death yourself but no brainless Jiralhanaes can kill The mighty Specter."_

_ "Where did you hear that?" Jones asked wrinkling his brow._

_ "From the rest of the file." Putumee said as if nothing could be

more natural._

_ "Where are they?" Jones asked suddenly more alert. "Are they here? Are they alright?"_

_ "Calm yourself file leader," Putumee said raising a hand. "They are in the medical bay down the corridor. It seems humans and Sangheilis have separate treatment needs so separate bays are used." Jones nodded understanding then._

_ "That's good," Jones said feeling sleepy again._

_ "File leader," Putumee started a little hesitantly. "I would like to express my thanks for treating my wounds on the field of battle."_

_ "Don't worry about it," Jones said raising his hand and letting it drop to the bed._

_ "What I meant was-" Putumee started again but was cut off by the nurse._

_ "You, what are you doing here?" She demanded of Putumee. "You know you're confined to bed rest for another 24 hours." Nothing to say for himself Putumee hung his head and slowly wheeling himself out muttering some sort of apology as he passed her. She then walked over and stood beside Jones. "And you should be getting some rest sergeant."_

_ "I have been resting for....," Jones started not knowing the answer._

_ "18 hours," The nurse explained opening a drawer on a cabinet next to Jones's bed pulling out a syringe. "But you need to get more so your wounds can heal quicker." She injected the contents of the syringe into Jones's left arm. "This will ease the pain and help with your sleep."_

_ "I don't...need...any...an...anymo...anymore...reeeeee...st," Jones managed before slipping back to sleep. Satisfied the nurse walked out throwing the used syringe into a locked container on the wall by the door. Over the next week Jones was confined to the bed, only leaving to use the bathroom, as his body healed. The cuts on his face were healed completely expect for the deep ones that were becoming scars, the holes in his back closed up and scars themselves, and his shoulder pain free after undergoing reconstructive surgery. More marines showed up throughout the week giving him some company all of just as or more severely wounded as Jones. The walking wounded were treated plant side only the severely wounded evacuated to the ship for treatment expect for the Elites almost all of their wounded were evacuated to the ship._

_ "I think you should get up and walk around a bit," The nurse said as she picked up Jones's tray of eaten food._

_ "Oh can I warden?" Jones mocked as he had asked early in the week to leave to see his file. The flustered nurse went to pick up a marine's tray that had his left arm blown off. Jones swung his legs out over the edge of the bed and stood up easily now his legs only weak from spending so much time inactive. Jones started out at an old

man's shuffle then moved to a march as his leg muscles loosened up. He walked the corridors until he found the medical bay used by the Elites. The first thing Jones noticed was the number of wounded Elites to marines was much higher. He thought that maybe it was their combat style, and that did have something to do with it, but he had a feeling it was because they were being used as shock troopers._

_ Sangheili medics support by UNSC doctors and nurses treated the various wounded and eased their pain. One of their medics walked up to Jones and spoke in Sangheili._

_ "What are you doing here?" He demanded. "We are overworked as it is and don't need another human getting in our way." Jones bowed slight and brought a fist to his shoulder before also speaking in Sangheili._

_ "My apologies," Jones said straighten back up. "I am just here to check on my file." A shocked look came to the Elite's features, he quickly composed himself._

_ "So you are the human file leader," He said crossing his arms. "The 'invincible' Specter we keep hearing about. Your troops are over there." The Elite said pointing a slender finger at a corner near the back. Jones walked back there, they spotted him first however and beckoned him over._

_ "_Fulsamee, Rolamnee, Mortumee," Jones said cheerfully as he sat down on Mortumee's bed. "Where are the other?" The three Elites looked at each other and back at Jones unsure of what to say, finally Mortumee spoke up.

"File leader we are all who survived," Mortumee explained. "Did no one inform you?" The smile on Jones's face vanished and he felt a wave of sorrow and self pity wash over him but it was quickly replaced by anger. This wasn't his fault he had done everything right damn it, it was the fucker who pulled their air support that's whose fault it was.

"Are you alright file leader?" Fulsamee asked raising a hand meaning to place it on Jones's shoulder but pulled it back after seeing the dressing there.

"Yeah I'll be fine," Jones said coldly. He had lost men under his command before but this was different it could have been prevented. They talked for awhile about the battle, even _Putumee wheeled himself over in his chair he refused to give up. Putumee, Fulsamee, Rolamnee and Mortumee may have accepted Jones may have even grown to like him but the rest of the Sangheili in the medical bay weren't too sure. Jones could tell from the sideways glancing and the whispers, he was sure they were telling the 'Specter's' story. Jones excused himself and went back to his medical bay with his fellow humans but he wasn't exactly welcomed with open arms there either. Word was getting around that he was the marine leading Elites, could write and even speak their language and there were whispers that he a human, a marine in fact, was banging a Elite. They would speak with him but only if Jones started the conversation and their answers were always short and quick never being able to get down talking fast enough. Jones was in between two species he wasn't a Sangheili but they were slowly starting to admire him, while he was growing apart from his own species. Hamanee's officer started to reappear in Jones's head as

he started to think about it more seriously._

_ The next day Jones was placed back on active duty and he was allowed to leave the medical bay, after they had removed all of his bandages and change back into his uniform. Jones shut his locker and was about to leave when a marine stopped him._

_ "Staff Sergeant Jones?" The private asked him._

_ "What can I do for you private?" Jones asked sternly squaring up with him._

_ "Uh, Coronel McKay wants to speak with you staff sergeant," The private said._

_ "McKay, he's the one that is in charge of ground operations for our sector right?" Jones asked crossing his arms._

_ "I believe so staff sergeant," The marine said._

_ "Thank you private I can take it from here," Jones said walking past him meaning to leave the locker room when the private spoke again._

_ "Excuse me staff sergeant," The private said causing Jones to stop and turn._

_ "What is it?" Jones asked sharply clearly becoming irritated. The private dropped his gaze to the deck._

_ "I just wanted to know, you don't have to say any thing...I mean is it true about you and the Elite...you know the female one?" The private asked rubbing the back of his head still looking at the deck. A smile came to Jones face then as he tried to think of a good answer._

_ "Just rumors private," Jones explained coming up with a lie. "Causes by the truth of me being a translator for a female Elite is all." _

_ "Oh I apologize staff sergeant I was just curious was all," The private said looking up but Jones was already gone. Jones nodded to the on duty clerk as he knocked on Coronel McKay's door._

_ "Enter , " The muffled voice commanded on the other said. Jones opened the door and walked in letting it shut behind him. Jones snapped to attention in front of McKay's desk and saluted._

_ "Staff Sergeant Allen Jones reporting as ordered," Jones said holding his saluted until McKay stood and returned the gesture. Then he did something Jones did not expect, he extended his hand for Jones to shake._

_ "Sergeant I just want to say you did one hell of a job holding the line," McKay said as he shook Jones's hand._

_ "Thank you sir," Jones said pulling his hand back after McKay let go of it returning to the position of attention. Jones expected McKay to say take a seat or at the least 'at easy' but instead he picked up a document from his desk and read from it._

_ "Let it be known that the council of the UNSC _has reposed special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities of Jones, Allen D. In view of these qualities and his demonstrated potential for increased responsibility, Jones, Allen D. is here by promoted to gunnery sergeant effective immediately on the date of March 14th 2553. Sighed General Frank Lord commanding." McKay said reading the promotion order in a monotone voice. Jones felt pride wash over him as he stood perfectly still as McKay finished. He put the document back on his desk and holding Jones's new rank in his right hand he shook Jones's hand again passing off the new rank.

"Thank you again sir," Jones said as he slipped the rank into his pocket planning on sewing it on later.

"Please take a seat gunnery sergeant," McKay said turning around and walking over to table that held bottles filled with different colored liquids. Jones sat down in one of the two chairs in front of McKay's desk. "Can I get you a drink sergeant?" McKay asked. Here Jones was supposed to say no that he was fine but he felt like he was owed a few drinks.

"Bourbon if you got it sir," Jones said. McKay chuckled a little.

"Most enlisted would be scared shitless," McKay explained handing Jones a glass of amber colored liquid. "Not you, after how long you've been fighting this war and what you have lived through I don't blame you." McKay sat back down behind his desk, opening a box of cigars and officered one to Jones who declined preferring cigarettes. Shrugging McKay lit one himself and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"Was there something else sir?" Jones asked as he sipped his drink.

Indeed there is," McKay said placing a small wooden box on the desk. "I believe you are no stranger to these." He opened the box and Jones could see a sliver star shining inside.

"Thank you once again sir," Jones said and then after swirling his drink a little. "Sir permission to speak freely?"

"I think you have at least earned that much sergeant," McKay said exhaling another cloud of smoke.

"Sir do you know who reassigned our air cover?" Jones asked finishing his drink. McKay leaned forward and exhale a cloud of smoke.

"I did sergeant," McKay answered puffing on his cigar.

"May I inquire as to why sir?" Jones asked his voice becoming a little more icy.

"You may," McKay said. "I needed to make sure the convoy succeed in its mission."

"Do you think it was necessary to assign two Pelicans to give air cover for a amour column supported by two companies of infantry sir?" Jones asked placing his glass on the desk.

"And do you find yourself qualified to make such calls gunnery sergeant?" McKay asked his voice also becoming icy.

"No sir I guess I don't," Jones said. "But would you have pulled the air cover if we were a human squad?"

"What are you implying sergeant?" McKay demanded his cigar forgotten.

"Sir it's obvious, to me anyway," Jones explained undeterred by McKay's cold stare. "You are using the Elites as shock troopers. Sending them in first against poor odds with little to no support of their own. Then you send human forces to take advantage of the opening created by the Elites. They don't notice because of their honor and gung-ho nature. That's what I think sir."

"I think you forget yourself gunnery sergeant," McKay said getting to his feet. "I also think you forget what color your blood is and what the Elites have done in the past. I suggest you remember those things double time and get the fuck out of my office."

"Of course sir," Jones said standing and saluting. McKay returned the salute and Jones turned on his heel and marched out grabbing his silver star. McKay stuck the cigar back into his mouth and shaking his head sat back down going over other documents. Jones meanwhile was wondering the ship's corridors his anger not gone but subsided. He march at a determined pace, not sure where he was going knocking the shoulder of a unfortunate private that didn't get out of the way quick enough. Jones would have continued like that if he hadn't run into an Elite bring him to a dead stop and knocking him back a foot.

"My apologies," Jones said in Sangheili without looking up.

"Jones how are you?" The Elite said in that soothing voice he had come to know.

"Greetings Yuka," Jones said shamelessly looking her up and down before setting on her face.

"I heard you were promoted," Yuka said. "I wanted to pass on my condolences and buy you a...drink."

"How do you know about that? I mean I just left," Jones said very confused as he hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "I didn't even know I was being promoted until a few minutes ago." She only smiled at Jones and gave him a wink that only confused him more.

"There are things you don't know about me," She said walking away. "How about that drink?" Jones fallowed her going in to a trance she always seemed to put him in. She lead them back to her quarters and poured them both glasses of a glowing blue liquid. She sat down on the bunk after handing Jones his drink, Jones chose to sit in the chair for the desk facing her. She leaned back slightly and crossed her long slender legs her short dress barley able to keep her covered. That got the Jones's blood flowing to the right places and he felt himself flush a little as he sipped his drink.

"My husband informed me he made you a officer," She started in her

smooth as silk voice. Jones felt the back of his neck and arms break out in goose flesh at the sound of it.

"About going to his home planet?" Jones asked taking another drink hoping it would calm him down.

"Indeed," She said uncrossing her legs and re-crossing them slowly.
"It's my planet as well."

"Uhm...yes I see," Jones stammered have caught a glimpse of her delicate undergarment.

"Well have you given any thought to his offer?" She asked.

"I have," Jones said taking another drink. "I think if we're both still alive when this is over I will go back with him...and you."

"That is wonderful news," She said. "May I inquire as to what changed your mind."

"It just that I have become closer with the Elit...more Sangheili then I have marines," Jones explained.

"How severally were you injured?" She asked sitting up straight.

"Uh...well I'm alive so not to badly I guess," Jones said finishing his drink and placing it on the desk.

"May I see?" She asked her voice somehow becoming even smoother.

"Yeah sure," Jones said a little unsure as he got to his feet. His heart starting to race as he unbuttoned his uniform jacket before slipping it off, he then rolled up the right sleeve of his olive drab undershirt. His heart really started to race as he walked over and stood in front of Yuka.

"My. My," She said softly as she ran her rough but gentle fingers over the indent in his right shoulder caused by the Brute's spike.
"Is that the only one?"

"There is my back," Jones explained.

"I would like to see that as well," She cooed. Jones complied by turning around and left his shirt up in the back reviling the scars left by the other spikes. "It's a miracle you survived." She remarked as she gently pushed Jones down by the shoulders so he was sitting on the bed with her.

"It's not as bad as it looks," Jones said removing his shirt all the way to kept his arms from cramping.

"Maybe you are correct," She said softly running her hands down Jones's back. His arms imminently broke out in goose flush again and exhale loudly out of his nose. "You should try to relax." She said gently rubbing his back and shoulders, Jones relented again and felt his muscles loosen. He reached down unlacing his boots before taking them off. Jones felt Yuka's warm sweet breath on the side of his neck

just before her tongue. That caused Jones to become erect as he leaned his head back so he could kiss her. He then turned around and slowly pushed her back onto the bed. She raised her hands over her head to allow Jones to remove her dress before returning to their kiss. His right hand worked its way down to caress her womanhood through her undergarment. She moaned softly into Jones's ear then as she grabbed his back and lightly dug her nails in. He then moved his hand behind her underwear and inserted three of his fingers into her. She moaned again her nails digging in more causing more goose bumps along his back. With his free hand he removed her bra and moved his tongue in small circles around both her nipples.

"Please get on with it Jones I can't stand the waiting," She moaned releasing his back. Jones raised himself up moving to a kneeling position before his slide her underwear completely off. He then unzipped his pants and removed them along with his underwear carefully pulling out his full erect member that ached to feel the inside of her again. He rested the tip of it against her womanhood causing her to sigh deeply and arch her back in anticipation. Jones slowly and gently slid into her savoring every second. As he started to thrust slowly he bent down wrapped his arms around her back, and staying in his kneeling position, pulled her upright. He started to thrust upwards at a quicker pace as she started to bounce with him moaning softly. She reached out with her arms and embraced Jones resting her head on his shoulder.

"I love you," She whispered into his ear. He then pushed her back once again this time going with her their chests touching, her head still resting against his shoulder. His thrusting had speed up her moaning matching the speed as he kissed the side of her neck.

"Almost," She managed to breathe into Jones's ear as he went even faster and harder his thighs smacking into hers. She let out a soft roar soon after and Jones felt her tremble both inside and out as she dug her nails into his back again. That, as always pushed him over the edge and he let out a grunt as he let himself go. He wanted for himself to soften before he pulled out and looked her over. She looked so beautiful to him then as she lay there panting heavily with a sheen of sweat covering her delicate yet powerful body. He laid on his back next to her, she resting her head on his bare chest and placed a hand on his stomach.

"I will find you the perfect mate," She said breaking his train of thought.

"What?" Jones asked turning his head to look her in the eyes.

"Once we get back to mine and Huka's plant I will make sure I find you the mate you deserve," She clarified.

"Oh," Jones said looking back to the ceiling. He felt perfectly at pace then the coronel's disregard for the Elite's safety and fallen comrades forgotten. To Jones at that point in time everything seemed right with the universe.

17. Battle ready

Sighing heavily Jones laced up his boots as Yuka slept peaceful in

the bed beside him. Now fully dress he looked at her one more time before leaving the room and shutting the door very quietly. He walked back to the locker room looking at his watch he had roughly 47 minutes before he had to be in full battle rattle and in the launch bay. Opening his locker with another sigh he started to strap on is discolored and beaten to hell body armor. That was expect for the plates that went across his chest, back and shoulders, he had drawn new ones from supply since his old ones were useless to him. He pulled on his ammo vest next still full of holes and rips and even stained with his blood. Jones placed the helmet on his and the HUD flashed to life on his goggles that had replaced the green tinted eye pieces. Dressed for battle he stopped at the armory to retrieve his weapons and ammo before marching to the launch bay. Inside was a waiting Phantom and nine Elites in a line with one in front of them, for a total of ten, who called them to attention as Jones entered.

"Carry on," Jones said walking over to the Elite in charge Mortumee. "Report."

"File leader the fine is formed and ready for combat," Mortumee said.

"Outstanding now fall in," Jones ordered. Mortumee brought his fist to his shoulder and bowed before running to join the rest of the Elites in the line. Jones started at the right of the line walking downing looking each Elite over and tugging on their combat harness to see if they were loose. In the line stood the survivors: Fulsamee, Rolamnee, Mortumee and _Putumee along with the replacements: Juminee, Ganinee, Opcamee, Ilonae and Yanginee. Jones walked back out so in stood in front of the formation._

_ "At easy," Jones said speaking loudly and clearly. The Elite stayed at attention for they didn't know the command he just gave. "First things first I hate to disappoint you but this isn't a combat landing. We are simply going down to reinforce a company that damn near lost an entire file. The same company and file I was in along with _Fulsamee, Rolamnee, Mortumee and _Putumee. Look sharp we want to make a good impression on our field marshal. Fall out and board the ship." The Elites ran to board the waiting Phantom as Jones watched them to make sure they all made it on. Slinging his rifle across his back Jones boarded the Phantom and watched as the Elites strapped themselves into the jump seats. Jones walked up to the hatch that separated the troop compartment from the cockpit and banged on it twice signaling they were ready for takeoff. The pilot banged back once meaning he understood and the deck started to vibrate as the engines roared to life. Jones preferring to stand again grabbed onto something above his head as the side hatches closed._

_ The deck lurched forward as the pilot gunned the engine and the craft shot out into void of space. Jones looked the Elites over trying to judge what they we're feeling. All the replacements who were also rookies clad in blue armor appear to look calm and for the most part were. But Jones could tell by the way they would bounce their leg a single time or ran a hand along their combat harness checking the various pouches were full and fasten, that they were anxious. The veterans, now showing it having traded their blue armor for red not only looked calm but were calm simply seating back and enjoyed the ride making no other movements, hell _Rolamnee even dozed off. They were still calmer than most marines on their first drop

combat or not however. The ride would have passed in complete silence if one of the replacements: _Yanginee hadn't spoken up._

_ "File leader?" The young Elite said looking up at Jones._

_ "What is it?" Jones asked looking Yanginee in the eyes._

_ "Is it true?" Yanginee asked dropping his gaze for a moment under Jones's stare._

_ "Is what true?" Jones asked raising an eyebrow._

_ "You are mating with a female Sangheili?" Yanginee asked dropping his gaze to the deck for just a second again. All the Elites stared at Jones now awaiting his answer even Rolamnee had woken up and begun to stare at Jones. It took every ounce of discipline for Jones not to stare at his boots and remain eye contact with them. He pondered his answer: tell them the truth and possibly be despised or lie while they may actually know the truth and lose what little respect they had for him._

_ "Yes it is," Jones said finely._

_ "Could I inquirer as to how you two came to be?" Yanginee asked.

_ "You could," Jones said and after a few moments of awaked silence he added. "I'm not going to tell you tough." A little let down but satisfied enough they stopped staring at him and Jones was left alone with his thoughts again. The rest of the trip was in silence only to be broken by the pilot._

_ "30 seconds until we land," The pilot said via the com. "Prepare yourselves."_

_ "Alright look sharp," Jones said addressing the Elites who as before stood in _unison and turned to file out. There was a dull thump as the pilot brought the ship down on landing pad three inside the FOB opening the side hatches as he did so. "Go! Go! Go!" The Elites filed out in a neat and orderly fashion and immediately started a formation. Jones was the last one off making sure they didn't leave any gear behind before taking his place in front of the formation.

Field Marshal Huka Hamanee walked out of the command bunker given to the Sangheili. When he saw Gunnery Sergeant Allen Jones in charge of his replacement forth file he didn't know if he was going to shake his hand or embrace him. Instead with a determine look on his features walked over to the formation. Jones saw Hamanee approach and acted as he was trained in the marine core adding with it what he had picked up from the Sangheili.

"Group attention!" Jones shouted the Elites snapping to attention. He then did an about face and looked Hamanee in the eye. "Excellently the file is formed and ready for deployment as you see fit."

"Very well file leader," Hamanee said stopping in front of Jones. "Have them proceed to the barrack to receive bunks and store their equipment."

"As you command Excellently," Jones said with a slight bow before facing his file again. "On the command 'fall out' double time to the barrack store your gear and await for further orders. Questions?" One of the replacement raised his hand but Jones knew what the question was going to be before he called on him. "Double time means run." The Elite dropped his hand and held his peace. With nothing else to be said Jones gave the command and the Elites ran to complete their tasks. After they were out of sight of both Hamanee and Jones the battle hardened field marshal did embrace the marine lifting him off the ground and constricting his air intake before putting him back on the ground.

"Jones it is wonderful to see you," Hamanee explained. "I had thought you had perished in your last battle."

"No I'm not that lucky," Jones wheezed trying to suck in the air that was forced out of him. Laughing Hamanee slapped him on the back which only knocked a little more wind out of his lungs.

"Come you have missed much being absent for such a long period," Hamanee said walking back towards the command bunker. Jones walked along side his friend.

"I was only gone for just a little under two weeks," Jones said.

"In battle two weeks can change the course of the war," Hamanee explained as he entered the bunker. Jones thought he was being a little to dramatic but he would bite.

"So how goes the war then?" Jones asked stepping into the bunker with Hamanee.

"Extremely well in our favor," Hamanee explained. "It seems the Jiralhanae are not the feared warriors they liked to believe."

It was true when the Covenant disbanded they took with them their superior technology of weapons, armor, vehicles and ships leavening the Jiralhanae with their own weaponry and dwindling Covenant leftovers. Making it easy for the humans to use old school shock and awe tactics and steam roll right over them with the Elites clearing the path. Jones was right they were being used as shock troopers.

Hamanee lead them to the hallow table and started a program the landscape coming to life with a city in the center surrounded by smaller clusters of buildings spaced out around it. Miniature vehicles and soldiers colored blue started at the edge of the table and work towards the first cluster of small buildings. When they reached the buildings there were red blossoms in and around the buildings to simulate explosions. To one side of the buildings were a small number of blue soldiers with orange ones running at them from the buildings with the simulated explosions mixed in with both groups.

"Look familiar?" Hamanee asked as Jones leaned closer to the battle. He recognized the two hills guarding the pass into the valley and the line of soldiers was his file.

"That when we assaulted the Brute encampment," Jones said straightening back up.

"Correct," Hamanee said. "After we secured that location McKay split the assault force." The large blue group split into two groups then leaving the now black building behind one going left the other right each heading to different cluster of building. When they reached them more red blossoms before they turned black and the blue miniature forces continued on.

"Brutal," Jones remarked.

"Indeed. What followed was a weeklong campaign to clear out and destroy any Jiralhanae strong holds and camps," Hamanee explained the blue forces' actions. "This leaves only there capital city." Hamanee explained pointing at the large cluster of tall buildings.

"The rest of the planet?" Jones asked.

"With support of the orbiting ship ground operations in other sectors has been just if not more successful," Hamanee said with a pleased smile on his features. "The only remaining Jiralhanae installation is this city." Jones could see now on the hallow table the city was surrounded by a blue ring.

"So what: just shell the fucker from orbit?" Jones asked crossing his arms.

"That would be ideal but not meant to be," Hamanee said with a heavy sigh. "The planet wide campaign has left the ship's ammunition reserves nearly depleted."

"So what has McKay cooked up then?" Jones asked his mind going back to what he had side in his office.

"The opening salvo will be from the ship," Hamanee explained as massive blossoms appeared in the middle of the city causing the buildings they hit to go black showing they were destroyed. "They will take out several command and control centers as well as the city's main troop concentrations and defenses." Now much smaller blossoms appeared in the city along with small blue ships that buzzed around the city like angry bees around a nest.

"What's that?" Jones asked pointing at the smaller blossoms and buzzing ships.

"Second salvo," Hamanee said as if nothing could be more natural. "Combined air strikes and are...arey...tillor-"

"Artillery fire," Jones said for the Elite as he struggled to pronounce the word.

"Exactly," He said. "That will clear the way for us." Now new blue craft flew into the city but instead of buzzing wildly they speared out and dispersed miniature blue soldiers that took up positions inside buildings and along street corners. A blue line appeared from the edge of the city zig zagging its way towards the middle passing by and connecting all the ground forces within the city.

"Air drop troops in to the hot to create a 'clear' path through the city," Jones said after the blue line had appeared.

"Impressive," Hamanee remarked the human continued to surprise and impress him. "This it to make way and allow a rather lar-"

"Rather large armor column," Jones finished for him as he looked at the table his brow wrinkled in thought.

"How did-" Hamanee began.

"I have seen this before," Jones said looking at the table. "I just can't remember where or when. I also can't explain why it leaves a bad taste in mouth."

"A what in your mouth?" Hamanee asked.

"It means I got a bad feeling about it," Jones explained still not looking away from the table. He wasn't sure but he thought there was a similar operation a long time ago. They had dropped troops behind enemy lines to secure a route for a massive armor convoy. He also could have sworn it didn't work and he couldn't remember why or how bad their losses were. "Who are the troops being air dropped in?"

"We have the honor and privilege of going into battle first," Hamanee explained. "All the Sangheili will find positions and hold them until the armor rolls through." The bad taste in Jones's mouth just got worse after hearing that.

"When?" Jones asked tonelessly.

"Two days," Hamanee said switching off the hallow table.

"If you'll excuse me your Excellently I have other business I must take care of," Jones said bowing bringing his first across to his shoulder.

"Very well file leader," Hamanee said returning the gesture. Jones walked out and over to the armory for the UNSC personal. He walked in and was immediately met by the harsh cold stare for Lance Corporal Leonardo.

"Staff Sergeant Jones," Leonardo said placing his hands on the counter.

"That Gunnery Sergeant now Lance Corporal," Jones said pointing to the new rank he had sewed on his arm himself.

"Well what can I do for you Gunnery Sergeant Jones?" Leonardo asked his voice still thick with an Italian accent.

"I wanted to return the radio," Jones said setting the battered and dented radio pack he had taken from Mortumee. Sighing heavily Leonardo turned it on and had it run a self test on itself after a moment it passed.

"Well at least it works which is more then I can say for this," He said ducking behind the counter to retrieve the sniper rifle he had lent to Jones for his 'recon' mission. What he pulled up couldn't really be called a rifle any more. The stock was twisted and bent up as if someone very large had stepped on it. The top half of the scope was gone the insides were blackened and melted and the bipod had been completely snapped off. The barrel was in the worst shape, it started

out normal from the receiver then took a 90 degree turn to the left. Short afterward there was a jagged hole and then the barrel went upwards sharply.

"Hey I said I would get it back to you I didn't say it would be in good condition," Jones explained in his own defense.

"True," The armorer growled.

"And you only have to fill out one form for the replacement of a damaged weapon instead of the five and the possible investigation for a lost weapon," Jones explained.

"Again true," The disgruntled lance corporal said.

"Alright see you later Vinny," Jones said with a wave of his hand as he walked out of the armory. This got the lance corporal to shout rapid fire curses in Italian after him. Chuckling to himself Jones walked out and went to see how his file was settling into the barrack.

18. Beginning of the end

Jones removed the crumpled and torn pack of cigarettes from his right leg cargo pocket, he closed his left eye to peer into opening and was gravely disappointed. Sighing deep Jones used his front teeth to remove his last cigarette and crushed the pack even more before tossing it out the back of the Pelican. Jones removed the just as worn lighter from a pocket on his vest and flicked it open with his thumb. Holding the lighter close to the end of the cigarette he used his left hand to shield the flame from the rushing wind. He managed to get it catch on the first attempt and inhaled deeply his lungs filling with burning tobacco. Flipping the lighter closed and pocketing it Jones exhaled a cloud of smoke the wind rushing by outside whisked it out of the Pelican.

"Why do you do that?" Mortumee asking sitting hunched over uncomfortable in the jump seat instead of Jones for once. There were more Elites then there were ready available Phantoms to make sure all units were inserted into the Brute city at the same time the remaining ones were placed on Pelicans that weren't on gun runs or strike missions for the coming battle. That's were Jones's file rode flying in a lazy circle in a holding pattern waiting for the opening salvo to hit the unaware city.

"I don't really fucking know," Jones replied smoke following out of his nose and mouth. Mortumee continued to stare at Jones however until he saw he wanted a actually answer.

"It helps calm me down," Jones explained inhaling deeply again.

"Why don't all human partake in this custom then?" The Elite asked grimacing as a puff of smoke accidentally went up his nose. Jones laughed out loud as his mind went back to the conversation with the Elites back on Sole 7 and the one that hacked his lungs out after he had tried one. He stopped laughing quickly when he thought about the shipmaster and Mendez.

"Did I say something amusing?" Mortumee asked confused then.

"No, no," Jones said with a wave of his hand. "It's just I have had this conversation with an Elite, or uhm Sangheili. The long and short of it is that it can kill us but I'm a marine I thought I would be dead long before these killed me." Jones inhaled deeply then burning up the rest of the cigarette and tossed it out the back of the Pelican. "Doesn't matter now that was my last one." He said exhaling more smoke.

"At what time did you discuss this custom with a Sangheili?" Mortumee asked interested now.

"When I was captured during a raid on a Covenant ship," Jones said before he could stop himself.

"You were imprisoned by the Covenant and survived?" Mortumee asked awestruck.

"It's a long story and I don't like to talk about it," Jones said looking his assault rifle over. "I leave the past in the past." Or try to Jones thought. Mortumee nodded and went back to staring at his own weapon.

Meanwhile back at firebase Delta call sign 'firestorm' the captain in charge of the firebase stood in the open staring at his watch. The sergeants in charge of the different batteries, made up of 105mm and 155mm and the one massive 200mm railgun, stared at him. While the gunners and crew stared at their battery sergeants their guns aimed and loaded with hands on the firing levers, hearts thumping and backs sweating. The captain's watch read 0858 the Silent Dawn had already fired the remaining shells for its space to ground cannons but they wouldn't hit the city till roughly 0900. His orders were to fire at exactly 0859 his shells only taking a minute to reach their targets so both his and the ship's shells would hit at 0900. The captain raised his right hand into the air when he watch read 085845 the battery sergeants did the same as the gunners tighten their hand on the firing levers. One of the gunners whipped his forehead before quickly returning his hand to the firing lever. Just as he did so the captain threw his arm down the sergeants also dropped their arms with a shout of "Fire!"

The gunners pulled back on the firing levers and there was a deafening roar as the cannons were discharged in quick succession. The gunners hit the releases ejecting the still smoking chasings to the ground as the gun crews hurried to reload them while the gunners twisted the wheels to adjust the cannon's aim. The firing got more sporadic for the 105's shells were in one piece and simply need to be replaced while the 155s needed a powdered charge to be loaded behind the shell to propel it to its target. The slowest firing was the railgun requiring the use of a crane and a lot of effort.

As the shells screamed towards the city the Pelican pilot that had covered Jones when he held the line by the valley, call sign Lightening seven now, pushed his craft as fast it would go towards the city, his ship carried as much chaingun ammo as it could hold. It was also maxed out on rocket and missile pods as well as bombs. In the troop compartment a crew chief manned a heavy turret the back filled with ammo for the turret and the M41 launcher strapped across his back. His objective along with the 29 other equally armed craft roaring towards the city was to hit their assigned targets then

expend all their ammunition on other targets of opportunity. The pilot looked at the picture that was taped to the console that the recon drone had gotten him showing his target and its location.

"Would you look at that," The pilot said turning to his co-pilot. The aviators had failed to reach the city before the shells had started to land which was for the best for they didn't have to worry about being caught in the shockwave from one of the massive shells from orbit. They however could see the damage done by them as massive craters had appeared in the city seeming at random but he knew that each hit was a major loss to the Brutes' defense of the city. The shells from firebase bravo were still landing causing fire and_debris_ to blossom up from random locations inside the city.

"It's fuckin' beautiful," A pilot radioed to all craft sounding truly mystified.

"Lead to all craft," The squadron leader radioed right after.
"Proceed with gun runs and strike missions. Clear a path for the landings and good hunting gentlemen."

"Lightening seven breaking for attack," The pilot said into his helmet mike before banking his craft to the left.

"Shouldn't they be sending Banshees at us or something?" The co-pilot asked. "I mean this is their capital city after all."

"Their air capabilities were neutralized from orbit," The pilot explained glancing at the picture and adjusting his course respectively. "Didn't you pay attention in the briefing?"

"I might have dozed off," The co-pilot admitted. The pilot didn't say anything just shot him a glance that was louder than words. As the Pelican rounded a building their target came into sight.

"Arm everything and get me a firing solution," The pilot ordered the co-pilot snapping into action. He flipped up the red colored cover that protected the master arm switch and flipped it up as well. Red lights glowed to life letting them know that the chaingun, all rocket and missile pods, and bombs were armed. The co-pilot then turned on the targeting computer red diamonds filled the HUD, making it hard to see out of the view port, and some jumped around randomly for there were more targets then the computer could handle. This caused the computer to slow down and start to lose targets or come up with impossible ranges or directions for a firing solution. The co-pilot switched it off the their view now unobstructed.

"No go on the firing solution," The co-pilot said.

"Well we do this the hard way," The pilot remarked pointing the nose of his craft towards their target."We'll do it manually." Then speaking to the crew chief in the back. "Hang on we're going in."

"'Bout time," He radioed back. Their target was a Covenant leftover the Brutes were saving. It was a Mark I Scarab one of the massive ones that the Covenant had used on their assault of New Mombassa. As the pilot screamed towards the massive construct he let loose with

rockets, missiles and the chaingun. When they passed right over it he dropped three of his eight bombs on top of it. He then banked his craft in a lazy circle for another pass as the Scarab collapse to the ground unable to support its own weight anymore. The pilot hit it with a fury of rockets and high caliber rounds again and one more bomb for good measure. The crew chief meanwhile was hosing the Brute that were milling about below with his machinegun. A quote popped into his head then from a very old move that everyone in the UNSCMC is 'required' to watch at some point. He couldn't help but shout it out hoping the Brutes below could hear him as he fired at them.

"IF THEY RUN THE'RE VC! IF THEY STAND STILL THEY ARE WELL DISPLAINED VC!" He shouted at the top of his lungs as he chased a running Brute with fire till he caught him. The Scarab destroyed the pilot went looking for 'targets of opportunity' the crew chief still firing.

"This is Lightening to all Chalks proceed with landings," The squadron leader radioed to the waiting Phantoms and Pelicans circle at a safe distance. Jones didn't hear the radio transmission but he felt the sudden change of direction and the increase of speed.

"Get ready we'll be landing pretty soon," Jones said speaking to Mortumee who in turn relayed it to the Elite sitting next to him and so on. Jones pulled back the bolt on his assault rifle halfway to insure there was a round chambered. Satisfied he let it snap forward the sharp metallic click always reassured him. Their Pelican had reached the city and the pilot was flying low enough that he could see the fires, the collapsed buildings, and the Brutes milling around on roof tops and the streets below.

"One minute out," The pilot said over the speakers in the troop compartment.

"Is it going to be hot?" Jones shouted towards the cockpit.

"I don't fucking know," The pilot said. "Since this is a enemy city I would assume so."

"You know what they say about 'assume'!" Jones shouted back.

"No I fucking don't," The pilot said with a small chuckle. "20 seconds ground pounder." Jones flipped the safety off on his rifle and held it tight to his chest as he shifted his weight so he was sitting sideways on the jump seat. A moment later a flat roof top came into view and got closer as the pilot brought the craft down on it. The roof top stopped just inches from hitting the Pelican and stopped moving completely as the pilot brought his craft to a hover.

"Everybody out let's go!" Jones shouted as he jumped out of the Pelican. Shouldering his rifle and peering down the sights duck walked around the roof to make sure no targets were in sight. The Elites had dispersed and spread out along the roof as the Pelican free of its burden flew off. Immediately after it did Jones and his file took fire from a roof top across the street from a building at a slightly lower elevation. The Elites took cover behind the wall that ran along the edge of the roof and returned fire. Jones fired a few rounds of his own but saw the problem right away, the range was too great and both sides could exchange a thousand rounds and not hit

each other with both having good cover. The only Elites that could get sure shots were _Opcamee armed with a carbine and Yanginee with a beam rifle but he wasn't waiting for a clear shot he would fire the moment he would see a Brute pop up getting close but not hit them._

_ "Alright cease fire!" Jones shouted ducking completely behind the wall resting his back on it. "Cease fire! _Mortumee get over here!" Mortumee running hunched over to stay behind the wall sat next to Jones.

"Reporting as required file leader," He said holding his plasma rifle to his chest.

"Give me the handset," Jones ordered. Having done a excellent job of being an RO before Jones had him be one again. Mortumee gave Jones the handset who keyed it holding up to his ear.

"Firestorm this is Chalk eight with a request for a priority fire mission over," Jones said.

"Go ahead Chalk eight over," A gruff voice on the other end said.

"Target it is a harden structure at," Jones looked over the wall his HUD giving him the coordinates. "Grid Zulu niner eight zero one by Yankee three eight one four. Fire one marking round over."

"Understood firing one marking round over," The voice said over the radio. After a minute a red burst suddenly appeared in the sky right over the street.

"Firestorm Chalk eight adjust your fire," Jones said trying to speak calmly as the Brutes' inaccurate fire hammered the wall and side of the building. "I say again adjust your fire: three degrees. Fire one marking round over."

"Roger adjusting fire three degrees," The gunner said. "Firing one marking round over." After one more minute of enduring Brute fire before a red ball of light exploded over the Brutes' roof top.

"Firestorm Chalk eight repeat your last," Jones said speaking quickly now. "I say again repeat your last fire for effect. Get it right or you'll hit us over."

"Repeating last coordinates firing for effect. I say again firing for effect over," The gruff voice said. This time they could hear the distance whistle of incoming rounds and then the whump for them hitting the building. After 17 rounds they stopped falling and the ground shook at the building collapsed.

"Good hit firestorm target leveled," Jones said. "Chalk eight out." Now free from fire Jones stood up and had the Elites circle around him. "Ok since you've got the long arms _Opcamee and Yanginee stay up here and provide overwatch. You see any Brutes on the street you take them out got it._

_ "Yes file leader," They shouted in unison. _

_ "The rest of us will swept this building and secure the ground floor and street corner," Jones explained pulling a small map square from a vest pocket. "We're in the middle of hostile territory and our job is to make sure that corner is locked down so the convoy when it gets here can make its turn without threat of ambush. And we have least then hour to do it."_

_ "We most proceed then," Putumee said having forced the roof door open before he disappeared inside._

_ "We go with him," Jones ordered sighing. The Elites filed through the door and in the back ground Jones could hear plasma fire._

_ "Will you be joining us file leader?" _Mortumee asked standing in the door way.

"I will in a second," Jones explained. "I've got to make my report first. Go have fun kill some bastards for me." Nodding and with just a hint of a smile on his features Mortumee disappeared into the building his radio antenna smacking the top of the door frame. With a small smile of his own Jones keyed his helmet mike. The radio built into his equipment wasn't as strong as the one Mortumee cared on his back but it would do for his purpose.

"Chalk one this is Chalk eight standing by with sit. rep. over," Jones said as his gaze was drawn to the destroyed building.

"Go ahead Chalk eight over," A voice slightly disrupted by static ordered.

"We have reached our target building and are moving to secure over," Jones explained.

"How large is the building? Over," Chalk one demanded.

"Three stories over," Jones said.

"Enemy strength? Over."

"Unknown only encountered small enemy force upon touch down over."

"Understood hold until convoy breaks through and your relief shows up out," Chalk one ordered ending the conversation. Sighing deeply Jones reached into his pocket where he kept his cigarettes and remember he had smoked his last one on the Pelican. He knew why this operation left a bad test in his mouth, it was a adaption of operation "Market Garden". Now if he was an officer they might have gone over operation Market Garden with him at the academy. He only knew of it because of Mendez's love of old movies. It had involved the use of paratroopers to capture and hold a series or bridges and roads to clear a path for a armor column. It had almost worked but a group of paratroopers holding a key bridge found themselves surrounded, outnumber and cut off running out of ammo to fight with ending in their capture and war dragging on.

Nothing he could do about it Jones pulled the IR strobe from his belt activated it and threw it on to the roof top so any trigger happy fly boys would know there were friendly's in the building. That was

another thing that bothered him with the expectation of Chalk one and his Chalk the rest of the Chalks were all Elites. They wouldn't know about sit. reps., calling for fire or marking friendly building. Still nothing he could do about it Jones walked inside the building rifle pressed into his shoulder. He walked down the short fleet of stairs to the third floor and walked into the smashed in door. In the hallway were Brute bodies and the walls were sacred with their gore and plasma burns. Satisfied that the Elites hand probably screeched ever inch of the building looking for more to kill Jones went to the bottom floor which happened to be a lobby. His best guess was this was some kind of apartment building. The Elites had dragged furniture and anything else they could find forming a makeshift barricade in front of the windows that over look the street.

"Report," Jones ordered.

"We having a commanding vantage point and all Jiralhane have been vanished with no wounded of our own," Putumee said pleased with himself._

_ "Outstanding," Jones said. "But this fight isn't over yet. They may not know we're here yet but when they find out they'll try to dislodge us. So dig in and get ready._

_ "Yes file leader," The Elites shouted in unison._

19. Peace

Jones's bolt locked back on an empty magazine as the last round spat from the end of his assault rifle. He watched through one eye partly block by the rifle's sights at the round took the Brute in the head snapping it back and knocking him to the ground. He hit the magazine release letting the empty mag hit the floor before shoving a full one in and hit the bolt release the bolt snapping forward as the ammo counter reset itself reading: 32. Having killed the last Brute in the latest group to assault their position Jones lowered his rifle and ducked back behind a over turned table he was using as cover. This was the third assault the Brutes had launched on their position without effect. To call them 'assaults' was a stretch, to Jones they seemed like groups lost and confused trying to find their way through their city and happen to stumble upon them. The opening salvo and air strikes must have really crippled them Jones thought as he peeked over the barricade to count the Brutes' bodies. He counted no less than 18 bodies from what he could see and he looked at his watch the convoy was due over two hours ago.

"File leader?" Mortumee asked resting his back against the table sharing Jones's cover. Being the RO Jones didn't want him to far away.

"What can I do for you?" Jones asked turning his head to face the Elite.

"Could you tell me the tale of how you became imprisoned by the Covenant?" Mortumee asked.

"Still going on about that?" Jones said with a sigh.

"I must admit I'm very intrigued," Mortumee explained. "And it will

help pass the time."

"Pass the time," Jones said with a single shake of his head. "Did you forget this is a warzone?"

"Not at all file leader," Mortumee said patting the butt of his plasma rifle.

"It would be nice to be entertained as we wait for more of the beasts to arrive," Putumee said also clearly interested in hearing Jones's story.

"Opcamee and Yanginee will warn us if any Jiralhanae approach," Fulsamee added leaning forward to look past Putumee. Jones turned back to face Mortumee who looked at him expectantly.

"Alright, alright," Jones said shaking his head again. "What exactly do you want to know?"

"How you became the Covenant's prisoner," Mortumee explained peeking over the barricade to ensure no Brutes were near them.

"I was involved in a raid on a Covenant ship on Sole 7," Jones said beginning his story but was interrupted by Rolamnee.

"We know this already," He said sounding slightly irritated. "You destroyed the ship single handedly we want to know how you escaped capture."

"And how you were captured to start with," Mortumee interjected. Jones laughed a bit when he heard single handedly.

"You really think I destroyed the ship by myself?" Jones asked in amazement. The Elites either nodded or just stared at him. "Well I hate to disappoint you but I didn't. There were about 15 ODSTs that went along. Hell Mendez was the one that made and planted the bombs. Anyway after Mendez, Jenkins and I placed the bombs in the engine room we were running back to the launch bay being chased by a group of El1111- Sangheili when we got to a locked door. I started to hack it as Jenkins and Mendez watched my back. I had almost got it when a plasma bolt struck the wall near my head sending molten metal at my face. That's how I got this." He said pointing to the sacred side of his face now even worse off from the Brute's mauler.

"Then what?" Mortumee asked completely in tuned with Jones's story having leaned forward to hear better. Jones looked around and all the Elites were listing intently many having leaned closer.

"Mendez managed to get some water onto my face and help me to my feet," Jones started again to be interrupted by Rolamnee.

"How come we have not meet this one called Mendez?" He demanded almost cheerfully. Jones turned to face him his face suddenly dark.

"Because he died that night," Jones explained his mood instantly becoming dark carrying on with the story as his eyes glazed over as he relived the mission not being able to stop himself for telling it if he wanted to. "He was stabbed in the back by a cloaked commando Elite. He then violated Lieutenant Jenkins taking advantage of my

injury as I was unable to stop him. He then picked me up and laid me on top of her forcing me to do it as well."

"If this is too much for you to recount you are free to stop," Mortumee said feeling a little uncomfortable, all the Elites did then. Jones didn't hear him he couldn't lost in the memory as it flowed from his mouth as he fell deeper into the trance.

"They were all killed," Jones cared on. "He was going to kill me to and I was strangely at peace with it but a honor guard stopped him. They found out I was the one that hacked their system, could read their language and the shipmaster wanted to speak with me. So the commando knocked me out and took me to a cell and later I was taken before the shipmaster in her quarters."

"Did he say 'her'?" Rolamnee whispered to Putumee who nodded.

"She wanted me to be their translator," Jones said now completely on autopilot. "Wanted me to teach them my written language but she also wanted me to join the Covenant so I wouldn't think of it as betraying my side. She said they had disarmed the bombs but you can't disarm them that was the beauty of them. So I said yes figuring we were all going to die soon anyway. Then she wanted me to fuck her so I did thinking what the hell I would be dead soon enough. Afterwards they took me back to my cell and I waited to die when the first set of explosives went off knocking out the power and freeing me from my cell. I used the confusion to escape to the camp below and stole a Ghost and got clear of the blast radius before the ship blew." Finishing his story Jones shook his head a few times as he snapped out of it.

"Are you alright file leader?" Mortumee asked genuinely concerned.

"Yeah I'm fine," Jones said as he looked around unsure where he was. He snapped out of it when he looked into Mortumee's concerned face. "I'm fine really." He said his voice returning to normal as he forced the memory from his mind. The Elites stopped starring at Jones and went back to watching the street as an awkward silence fell over the group. He couldn't remember exactly what he had said but remembered it had something to do with the night Mendez had died. He was about to ask Mortumee, who had suddenly found the deserted street much more interesting, when his radio came to life.

"File leader I am requesting your presence immediately," Yanginee said.

"Roger I'm on my way," Jones said getting to his feet and jogging to the stairs.

"Who is this 'roger'?" Yanginee asked as Jones climbed the first flight of stairs. Jones chuckled to himself as he climbed the second. He reached the roof quickly and walked up to the two Elites as they rested their weapons on the roof's wall.

"What is it?" Jones asked coming up behind them.

"Jiralhanae," Was all Opcamee said pointing down not looking back. Jones had to crane his neck to see but he saw the Brutes. Unlike the groups before these ones were walking in formation and Jones could

count about 30 of them armed with various weapons some even had armor left over from the Covenant. They may have been in a formation but it was a long distance formation not a combat one, two tightly grouped columns of 15 leading Jones to think they didn't know they were there.

"Would you like me to vanquish them?" Yanginee asked staring at them through his beam rifle's scope as he tracked them.

"No," Jones said placing a hand on Yanginee's shoulder as he keyed his helmet mike. "Mortumee get to the roof on the double. Rolamnee, Putumee and Fulsamee move to the building across the street from your current position quickly and quietly do it now. We have a large group of Brutes moving down the street they don't know we are here so wait to fire until Yanginee does." Then closing the com channel turned back to Yanginee. "You are not to fire until I tell you to."

"Of course file leader," Yanginee said still peering through his scope. Jones leaned over the roof and from his vantage point he could see the three Elites run across the street and into the building using a blown out window. He could also see that the Brute had not seen them and their path would put them past the two building held by the Elites.

"Here as requ-" Mortumee began but Jones cut him off.

"Just get over here and give me the handset," Jones ordered holding out his right hand. He didn't have much time to set up the kill zone before the Brutes were in it. "You guys can drop a little formality in battle." Jones said bring the handset up to his ear fighting with his helmet a little.

"My apologies," Mortumee said. Jones didn't respond but keyed the handset.

"Firestorm this Chalk eight with an urgent fire mission over," Jones said watching the Brutes nearing.

"Go ahead Chalk eight over," Firestorm said able to hear the urgency in Jones's voice.

"Requesting harassing fire at grid Zulu niner eight one niner by Yankee three eight zero seven on my mark over," Jones said letting the handset slip from his hand but he could still hear their response.

"Roger holding fire until your say so Chalk eight over," Firestorm said. Jones meanwhile had pulled all four frag grenades from his belt and placed them on the wall as he watched the Brutes got closer. Keying his helmet mike again he spoke to his troops.

"When you do fire hose the bastards," Jones said speaking quickly but clearly. "Try to hit them but you don't have to, whatever you do don't let up at all. Drive them back the way they came." The front of the Brute formation has just reached the street between the two buildings held by the Elites. The back of the formation had reached the four way intersection for the roads that ran along to either side of the two buildings leaving them with almost no immediate cover. Prefect.

"Alright take out the lead Brute," Jones said placing a hand on the middle of Yanginee's back. He took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly as he pulled the rifle tighter to his shoulder. He fired the round taking the Brute in the head blood blossoming from it as he fell to the ground. The rest of the Elites opened up then taking down five more Brute before they could even figure out what was happening as they walked into the hailstorm. The rest of the Brutes looked for cover but could find none that would save them from the hail of rounds coming at them from the left and right and from the ones picking them off from the roof. Then when the first of the four grenades Jones had thrown into the mix went off killing, wounding or scattering them they had, had enough and ran away back the way they had entered the meat grinder. When they did the first of rounds from the 105mm landed in the street and soon more started to land leaving the Brutes with a tough chose: Stay there and be blown to bits or be cut down in a hail of fire.

Jones had timed it perfectly having called in the fire mission just before he had thrown his first grenades. Harassing fire was different from effective fire as the rounds were further apart with a longer lull between rounds and the area they cover was large meaning to keep the enemy from advancing or in this case retreating. The last round fell shortly afterwards the dust settled and Jones couldn't see any living Brutes but the Elites kept firing fallowing his orders to the letter.

"Alright cease fire!" Jones ordered shouting so Yanginee, Opcamee and Mortumee could hear and then keyed his mike. "Cease fire! Cease fire!" The fire didn't taper off but stopped all at once. Jones was extremely happy with how quickly they had set up the complex ambush and how well it was executed and was about to tell his Elites so when he felt the building shake beneath his feet as a dull roar reached his ears. "Now what?" Jones asked himself as he ran across the roof in the detraction the noise came from as the building began to shake worse. Jones brought his field glasses to his eyes and a smile touched his lips.

"What is it file leader," Mortumee asked.

"The fucking cavalry," Jones shouted over his shoulder lowering his glasses. "About fucking time to." Jones muttered under his breath. The lead vehicle of the convoy was a Scorpion with a dozer blade attached to the front of it to push debris out of the way or in the case of Jones's sector bodies. The MBT reached the intersection and made the turn with four more right behind it, all also had dozer blades attached. Behind them were Warthogs armed with everything from machineguns to surface to air missiles. Mixed in were more Scorpions and trucks packed with marines. Marching in long columns on either side of the vehicles were marines on foot the convoy moving at a brisk walking pace. Above them circled Hornets ready to provide close air support just for the convoy. The convoy seemed to stretch for miles as Jones couldn't see the end even with his field his glasses. He whistled as he lowered his glasses again.

"Never fear the marines are here!" One of the dismounted ones shouted towards the Elites as they walked out of the buildings.

"How many Brutes have you killed today?" Jones called after him.

"The tanks get most of them," The leather neck admitted looking up at Jones as he walked past. "But hell, the flyboys and Elites got most of them. That or we're so badass they run before we can get to them."

"So badass you go in after all the fighting is already over?" Jones taunted. The marine flipped him off as he rounded the corner staying next to a Warthog. Jones waved in response as he walked out of view.

"Chalk eight this Chalk one do you copy over," Chalk one's voice coming from the handset hanging from Mortumee's radio. Jones walked over to him and snatched it up and pressed it to his ear.

"Chalk eight solid copy over," Jones said waiting for the bad news he was sure was coming.

"Has the convoy reached your AO yet? Over," Chalk one demanded.

"Convoy has entered our AO and is proceeding," Jones explained. "Enemy presence has been minimal all contacts seem to have stumbled upon us accidentally over."

"Understood," Chalk eight said clearly not caring. "There is a Pelican inbound to your location now with reinforcements in one hour. They will be your relief you are to board the Pelican and return to base for debriefing. Over."

"Understood Chalk eight out," Jones said hanging the handset back onto the radio. He then keyed his own com. "Everyone back into the building. We only got to put up with this shit for one more hour."

"This battle is over?" Mortumee asked. "Well there be any more Jiralhanae to vanquish?"

"Probably not," Jones said walking away from the edge. "Not with that convoy moving through. Smoke if you got 'em I guess." Jones reached a hand to grab his pack of cigarettes, remembered he didn't have any and quickly pulled it back again. Mortumee reached into his combat harness and pulled out a brand new pack still in its plastic wrapping. He held them out towards Jones who practically snatched them out of his hand.

"You are officially my favorite now," Jones said looking it over. "I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth but where and why did you get this?"

"I knew you liked them so I traded with a human warrior," Mortumee explained sounding pleased with himself after hearing he was his favorite.

"What did you trade?" Jones asked ripping the plastic off.

"Just one of my grenades," He explained still pleased.

"You traded a plasma grenade for a pack of menthols?" Jones asked and then a little more quietly. "What pussy smokes menthols anyway?"

"You are not pleased?" Mortumee asked hearing Jones's tone.

"No I am," He explained opening the pack and removing one. "You just got the bad end of the deal is all." Mortumee lowered his head a little after hearing he was tricked. Jones stuck one in his mouth, he flicked his lighter open and lit it in one smooth motion. He inhaled deeply and almost coughed from the minty test that filled his mouth and lungs. Jones held out the pack towards Mortumee and shook it a little.

"I must refuse file leader," Mortumee said holding up a hand.

"Suit yourself," Jones said as he took another drag pocketing the pack. "I do have a question for you though. How does a plasma grenade work?"

"Well it's actually simple," Mortumee began but Jones cut him off.

"No, no. no," Jones said waving his hand that held the cigarette causing a zig zag of smoke to appear between the two. "I mean really work. For example, and I have seen this, how does it hit a stone wall but the fuse doesn't start until it hits the stone floor?"

"Well," Mortumee began again but got cut off again.

"I thought maybe it has some kind of gyroscope in it so the fuse only starts when it stops moving," Jones said inhaling more smoke. "But that's does explain how it can tell different materials apart. Another example, one I have also seen, I have seen the grenades bounce off of a metal wall without sticking but then stick to a marines metal assault rifle. How the fuck does that work?"

"Maybe it," Mortumee began a third time to be cut off yet again by Jones and his rant.

"Then that brings me do my next point how the fuck does a needler work?" Jones asked smoke following from his mouth and nose. "I mean just forget the whole needles that explode and focus on how they can seek a target. Plus how does it tell friend from foe, I mean I have seen an...Sangheili fire at a marine the needles ignoring the Grunt almost right next to him."

"It could be," This time Mortumee stopped himself knowing better by now.

"And it's not like it only ignores Covenant forces," Jones explained. "I have seen the same thing happen but with a marine wielding one and pick off a Grunt the rounds ignoring his buddy." After Mortumee held his peace for a while thinking Jones was going to continue Jones spoke again. "Well?"

"I must be honest I do not know file leader," Mortumee said finally being able to finish a sentence.

"That's alright," Jones said flicking the cigarette butt off the roof. "I don't really know how half the shit I use works either. Opcamee, Yanginee let me know if you see anymore Brutes coming."

"Will do file leader," Yanginee said without looking back. Jones walked back down to the lobby with Mortumee in toe lighting another cigarette. Jones was right and the hour pasted without incident the Pelican arriving on time dropping off the marines and Jones's file loaded up the craft flying off leaving the war torn city behind. He looked at his watch again from first landing in the city till now it had been a total of four and half hours. After a 45 minute ride back to the FOB Jones step off to what could only be describe as chaos. Marines were drinking, dancing, singing generally having a good time.

"What the fuck is going on," The battle weary Jones asked grabbing a marine by the arm holding a half empty bottle of liquor.

"Don't you know?" He slurred his eyes blood shot. "The war's over man we won." Jones let the marine go. He then stumbled over to a group of his buddies and passed the bottle around.

"When the fuck did that happen?" Jones asked himself.

"Roughly 30 minutes ago," A deep voice behind Jones said causing him to whip around.

"Excellently," Jones said coming to attention seeing Field Master Nosolee with Field Marshal Hamanee behind him.

"Relax human," Nosolee said placing a hand on his shoulder. "It seems that the beast leaders got one look of that convoy rolling toward their capital building and surrendered like the cowards they are."

"That is wonderful news excellently," Jones said.

"Indeed," Nosolee said removing his hand. "You may celebrate with you fellow warriors if you like. We have our own ceremony planed that is going to take place in the next hour or so if you so chose. I will leave you in the capable hands of Field Marshal Hamanee for I have other matters I must attend to." Jones bowed slightly as Nosolee walked away and Hamanee approached Jones.

"What is it?" Jones asked straightening back up.

"A ceremony to remember our fallen," Hamanee explained. "I hope to see you there my friend."

"I will be," Jones said smiling.

"Excellent," Hamanee said. "But do clean yourself up a bit and wear something formal."

"Of course," Jones said starting to walk away and then stopped. "Excellently." Jones added. Hamanee shook his head as he watched Jones make his way to the armory where he turned in his weapons to the still sober and on duty Lance Corporal Leonardo. That complete he went to his barracks and showered. With his towel wrapped around his waist Jones opened his footlocker and removed the item at the very bottom. It was the bag that contained his dress uniform. Sighing heavily he unzipped it and pulled out the black wool jacket and looked at the very large collection of campaign ribbons he had gotten

for each combat tour and deployment plus the collection of silver and bronze stars and purple hearts. Then the many stripes along the sleeves telling everyone how many years he had been a marine and the number of years he had spent in combat, the stripes went up to his elbows each one represent two years. In Jones's case they were exactly the same number of each as all of his years in the core had been in combat. He hated the flashy shit he didn't have anything else formal, if fact it had been so long since he had worn it the rank on the sleeves still said he was a corporal. The only reason the stripes and ribbons were up to date was because he would take the time to add them in case he to wear it again but he had spaced on the rank.

Sighing heavily again he pulled the dress rank from his footlocker he had gotten from McKay and using his field sewing kit sewed on his gunnery sergeant rank. He then gave his dress shoes a good shine until they were like mirrors before changing into uniform the last thing he put on was his brimmed cap and white gloves. Jones looked himself over in the bathroom mirror happy it still fit and picked out the microscopic wrinkles before marching out of the barrack the sun starting to go down. The uncomfortable and restricting garment trying to hinder his movements. As he walked around outside as marines gawked at him and his collections of ribbons he realized he didn't know where to go. He spotted a few Elites walking towards something and fallowed them.

"You look nice," Hamanee said as he rested his back against a barracks' wall dressed in his own formal armor. It was a brightly polished sliver trimmed in gold and seemed to lack a shield. Jones looked and could see the Elites he had been fallowing also wore the brightly polished sliver armor but trimmed in blue the other in red, leading Jones to believe that the color of trim was their color of combat armor they wore.

"You do to for an Elite anyways," Jones joked.

"That's Sangheili," Hamanee said a smile coming to his features. Laughing the two walked to the ceremony were the Elites had made a mass formation facing a podium where Field Master Nosolee stood. To his left were a number platforms and lying on each one was an Elite that had been killed in combat, that hadn't been blown to pieces, dressing in sliver armor hands clutching weapons that rested on their unmoving chests. The mood was heavy as Jones and Hamanee took their place in the formation. Jones was going to take one near the back but Hamanee dragged him to the front row where the field marshals stood. It was a good thing to for there was no way Jones could have been able to see over the number of Elites that would have been in front of him.

"Greetings," Nosolee said bringing a closed fist to his shoulder and bowing slighting.

"Greetings," The Elites echoed back also bowing Jones a little slow on the draw not having done this before.

"We gather here today not to mourn the loss of fallen brothers," Nosolee began his booming voice being able to be heard by all. "Instead to celebrity their leaving of this harsh and unforgiving time and their entering into paradise. They died honorably in battle and that is all we can ask of any of us if that is want is needed of

us. We must not let their memory fade, but we must also not dwell on their passing. Instead we must remember the joyous moments we shared with them, we must remember the victories not the defeats they took part in." Here he paused and turned to and gestured to a pair of Elites holding torches who marched to different ends of the platforms and stood holding the burning torches with both hands.

"Now we burn our fallens' bodies to free their sprits so they may reach paradise and eternal happiness." Nosolee explained. The torch wielding Elites starting at opposite ends began to set fire to the platforms the flames engulfing the bodies quickly. When the two reached the middle and set fire to the same body they both extinguished their torches and marched back into the formation.

"We take this time to remember them not as fallen but as the warriors they were," Nosolee said turning to face the burning platforms and bowing the rest of the formation doing the same. They stayed like that for a whole two minutes holding the bow watching the bodies burn only straightening up when Nosolee had. "You are dismissed to remember them in your own way." The field master then bowed again towards the formation who in returned bowed back before marching off. The formation started to fall apart as the Elites starting breaking into groups and a dull roar started to rise as conversations started.

"What did you think?" Hamanee asked Jones as the pair walked.

"It was both happy and sad," Jones admitted. "I gotta say I never thought I would be feeling sad for a dead Sangheili."

"And I thought I would never be friends with a human," Hamanee replied.

"I think I going to take you up on your officer," Jones said.

"You mean," Hamanee said coming to a stop. "You wish to come live on my planet?"

"Yes," Jones said stopping as well.

"That is wonderful news," Hamanee said picking the marine up and embracing him getting strange looks from other passing Elites.

"Easy. Easy," Jones grunted as Hamanee crushed him. The Elite put Jones back down on his feet and he took a few deep breaths before speaking.

"Let's go get a drink," Jones said using the back of his hand to slap Hamanee's stomach.

"Agreed," Hamanee said following his friend.

A week later after the FOB and all the outposts had been dismounted expect for the fences and concrete pads the Silent Dawn slowly pulled away from the planet as it prepared to make the jump to slipstream space. Next to it floated an Elite ship waiting to take its warriors back. Inside Captain McKnight's office Jones sat tapping his foot clearly nervous. McKnight placed the piece of paper he had been reading down on his desk and looked Jones square in his

eye.

"Son have you lost your goddamn mind?" He asked.

"No sir," Jones said then tried a joke. "Not yet anyway." McKnight just stared at him unimpressed.

"The only reason I am even granting you a chance to convince me otherwise is because of you outstanding combat record," McKnight explained.

"Sir you will see in my record that my home planet was glassed," Jones explained.

"Son I know," McKnight said rubbing his head. "You are going to have to help me understand why you wish to be discharged from active duty, don't get me wrong that's the easy part. You have enough years in service to retire with full benefits but why do you wish to relocate to the home planet of an enemy you spent most of your time fighting?"

"Honestly sir," Jones said looking the captain in the eye. "They're the closest thing I have had to friends in a long time." McKnight sighed before picking up the paper again and signing his name on it.

"Very well," He said placing the UNSC seal next to his name. "Gunnery Sergeant Jones, Allen D. you are hereby released from active duty with full benefits entitled to you from the UNSCMC. You are placed on the inactive reserve list for a minimum of 10 years to retain these benefits. During that time if you are called up you are required to report to active duty for a minimum of one year or one tour of duty whichever comes first. If you refuse you will lose any and all benefits and are required to pay back any compensation that has already been given to you up that time. You are also authorized to relocate to your current requested location. Do you understand these conditions as they have been explained to you?"

"I do sir," Jones said as McKnight flipped the paper around so Jones could read it.

"Then sign and date here," McKnight said pointed at the line with service member's name printed underneath it. Jones did as instructed and McKnight then stapled it on top of Jones record before using his computer to update his records electronically. "You are required to turn in all issued gear expect for your uniforms, undergarments, socks, physical fitness uniforms, cold weather gear, dress uniform towels and any hygiene items."

"Understood sir," Jones said gathering up his file and turning to leave.

"I would hurry the Elites are due to leave in 20 minutes," McKnight called after Jones as he left his office. Jones hurried to his locker and stuffed everything he was allowed to take with him in to a duffel bag and what he couldn't into rucksack and turned it in to the armory. The marine behind the counter inspected and counted every piece of gear to ensure it was all there and in working order, taking time Jones did really have. That complete he had Jones sign another form stating he had turned in all issued gear and had kept nothing he

wasn't supposed to. Carrying the heavy and overstuffed duffel bag in one hand he ran towards the launch bay looking at his watch. He only had three minutes to make it to the launch bay and when he looked up he had just enough time to see Hamanee before he smashed into him.

"Jones I was concerned you weren't going to make it," The Elite said helping him to his feet.

"So was I," Jones admitted as he followed Hamanee into the launch bay were the last of the Elites boarded a Phantom.

"Come on," Hamanee said as they climbed the ramp. "Let's go home." As Jones boarded the Phantom and dropped his duffel bag to his feet he thought about how long he had wanted to hear those words. The word home itself brought a whole new meaning to him however as the hatches closed and the Phantom flew into the black void beyond.

20. Homecoming

Gunnery Sergeant, now retired, Allen Jones sat on his over filled duffel bag waiting for the Phantom to take him 'home'. It had only been a few hours since he had boarded the Elite cruiser till he was riding in a Phantom heading towards the surface. Despite the short trip and stay on the ship Jones still managed to get separated from Hamanee, in fact he rode in a Phantom with Elites he had never meet at all. They sat in silence and every once in awhile one would cast a confused or disapproving glance at the human that rode with them. Jones could only set and wish he had a rifle to drum his fingers on to pass the time. Since that wasn't going to happen he pulled out his pack of cigarettes he had gotten from Mortumee and stuck one in his mouth. He pulled out his lighter and flicked it open and was about to light it when he saw every Elite was giving him a death stare.

"Right," Jones said the unlit cigarette moving with his mouth. "Sorry." He pulled it slowly from his mouth and stuck it behind his ear his patrol cap helping to hold it in place. The Elites turned their heads away from Jones all at once. Jones looked at the once new pack and counted the number to find out he only had 10 cigarettes left plus the one behind his ear. He didn't think about it before but he realized that he wouldn't be getting anymore on an Elite planet. So he should really quit but knew himself well enough to know he was only going to be forced to quit after 11 cigarettes. He then remembered his lighter, pulled it out flicking it open and smelt it. His nose picking up the smell of a brunt wick and underneath it a hint of lighter fluid. If my lighter doesn't run out first, Jones thought as he pocketed it. A sudden bump caused Jones to fall off his duffel bag.

"We are home bothers," The pilot said over the ship's com as Jones got to his feet again. The pilot opened the side hatches and the sound of joyful music and cheers floated in. Jones could see a large group of Elites had encircled the ship, mostly females, and were cheering, hugging, or shaking hands of the Elites that walked off the Phantom. Jones bought himself some time by pretending to tie his boots to make sure he was the last one off. He even waited for several minutes after everyone else had gotten off as he pretended to look for something in his duffel bag. After the music and cheering

had died down a little as some of the crowd started to leave following the returning warriors as the rest stayed for the arrival of more Phantoms Jones decided it was time.

Sighing heavily Jones picked up his duffel bag in his right hand and slowly walked down the ramp. In his mind he had pictured the music coming to a sudden halt and everyone turning to look at him as they slowly pulled out weapons to chase and lynch him. Instead the music continued to play and instead of staring the Elites did a lot of double takes as Jones walked down the ramp and through the crowd. The Elites that would have been in his way or even close backed away from him so he could walk by without saying a word. He suddenly realized he did know where he was going and decided he would clear the crowd and then figure something out. So he slightly lowered his head to look at the ground as he felt his face flush feeling the eyes of the Elites burn into him as he waded through the crowd. He had almost made it through when a female Elite stood in his way and refused to move. Feeling his blush deepen and fear grow Jones raised his head so he was looking her in the face. She reached down and gently placed a large necklace made of brightly colored and sweet smelling flowers around his neck.

"Welcome home warrior," She said lightly kissing his cheek. She then stepped aside allowing him to walk past now holding his head up but his blush just as deep. He cleared the crowd and started to climb a gently sloping hill. When he reached the crest a large city came into view way off in the distance. Setting his duffel bag down he sat on it again as he took out one of the two pieces of gear he kept and lied about being issued. Jones raised the field glasses to his eyes and got only a slightly better view of the seemly massive city. There were several tall building with some kind of craft flying between them. Around the massive buildings were smaller ones and what he assumed were homes. He swept the surrounding areas with the field glasses and found large rolling fields of crops he didn't recognize. Then really far off was a small grouping of buildings near a large field of crops he could only guess it was a village.

"What have I gotten myself into?" He asked himself as he lowered the field glasses and pulled the cigarette from behind his ear and stuck it into his mouth. He lit it shortly after and exhaled a cloud of smoke and looked at it thoughtful before it disappeared. For the first time since he was drafted he didn't know what to do. The core had always told him where he was going, when to eat, when to sleep and who to shoot so now having complete freedom he didn't know what to do with it. His field glasses had told him it was roughly 13 clicks to the city limits a long march but not the longest he had managed. Jones picked up his duffel bag and placed it on his back as he dropped the cigarette butt to the ground. He was about to stomp it out when he stopped and looked at how beautiful and untouched everything was. He felt a wave of guilt wash over him as he picked it up and pocketed it instead. He was about to set off down the other side of the hill and towards the city when he felt a powerful hand latch onto his left shoulder.

"Where do you think you are going human?" A deep voice demanded.

"Look I don't want any trouble," Jones said as his right hand slowly reach to his belt to garb the handle of the second piece of gear he kept.

"I think you don't have a choice," The voice said. Jones's right hand tighten on the handle as his left raised up into the air open palm.

"Look I'm not armed," Jones pleaded.

"It would make no difference if you were human," The voice said taking pleasure in the way Jones seemed to be begging. Jones could now tell he couldn't defuse this situation without violence. He hooked his left arm around his attacker's arm as he drew his combat knife with his right. Gripping his attacker's wrist with his right hand while still holding the knife he pulled with all his strength as he rolled his left shoulder forward, at the same time dropping to one knee. An Elite weighed a lot more than a human and if his attacker would have been ready Jones was sure he wouldn't have been able to pull off the flip but the Elite was pulled by his arm over Jones's shoulder and landed on his back his grip lost. Jones still holding the Elite's arm fully extended, taking all the strength from it, with his left arm wrapped around it pressed his right knee into the Elite's chest pinning him and held the combat knife to his throat. As he did this Jones leaned forward a bit and got a good look at his attacker's face.

"Hamanee!" Jones examined surprised as he pulled the knife back and released his arm. "You son of a bitch." Hamanee let out a hearty laugh as he got to his feet rubbing his wrist.

"You are still sharp Jones," He said placing a hand on his shoulder gently this time. "You wear a worthy opponent then and still are."

"Don't scare me like that," Jones said as he slid the knife back into its sheath clipped to his belt. Hamanee crossed his arms then and looked at Jones with a disapproving stare. "What?" Jones demanded as he picked up his duffel bag as it had fallen off during the scuffle.

"You used your small bladed human weapon," Hamanee remarked.

"My knife?" Jones said confused a little. "Yeah so?"

"Why did you not use you the sword I gave you?" He asked. Jones had almost forgotten about the energy sword that Hamanee had given him when he became a file leader.

"It's in my duffel bag," Jones explained patting the bag. "I didn't have easy accesses to it."

"You know unlike you humans we keep our weapons and are free to do with them as we please," Hamanee explained as he reached an arm out taking the heavy duffel bag from Jones's back.

"Yeah I know," Jones said happy to be relieved of his bag. "Look I don't know how well me being hear is going to go over and I don't need to give anyone a reason to pick a fight."

"Explain," Hamanee demanded as he lead the way down the hill towards a hovering vehicle at the bottom.

"Ok let's see," Jones said thinking up an example. "Alright I got it. Say I do walk around with it clipped to my belt for all to see and I go get a drink in a bar or inn or wherever it is you get a drink here. Then let's say some Sangheili had a little too much to drink. He sees the sword on my belt, then challenges me to some kind of duel. The next thing I know I'm crossing blades with a warrior that knows how to better fight with a energy sword then I do. For sake of argument lets say I manage to win then I have to fight all of his buddies because they must avenge their friend for he was killed by a lowly human."

"I see you point," Hamanee said placing Jones's bag in the back of the vehicle.

"Greetings Jones," Yuka said from the front seat of the vehicle with a small wave.

"Hello Yuka," Jones said as he got into the back seat behind Yuka as Hamanee settled into the driver's seat. "I'll stick with my knife thank you. It's easier to conceal and it can tip a fist fight into my favor. Plus this knife has sentimental value to me. It's wasn't issued by the UNSCMC but given to me by my father." The vehicle had started to move at a good clip as Jones explained why he'll stay with his combat knife. He took another cigarette from his steadily dwindling supply and lit it inhaling deeply before he let out a cloud of smoke it being whisked away by the rushing wind from the open top vehicle.

"When did you start that custom?" Hamanee asked as he steered the vehicle towards the city. "And why did you start? I know why you explained that 'it claimed you down' but why did you do it the first time?"

"Well," Jones began sticking the cigarette in the corner of his mouth and breathed in and out the smoke from the naturally action of talking. "Many years ago when I was still just 18 just after my first firefight. I was sacred during I even almost died several times but after it was over it was much worse, my hands and body shook so bad I couldn't even reload my rifle. Mendez comes up to me and officers me one of his. I have always been against smoking thought it was a very bad habit but he told me it would help my nerves, plus I trusted Mendez with my life so I took one. I hacked my lungs out the first time but my hands didn't shake and I did feel a little better."

"You always speak highly of this Mendez was he a companion?" Yuka asked turning around in her seat to face Jones.

"My best friend," Jones explained and before he was asked. "He was killed in battle a little after you meet him."

"We have meet the one called Mendez?" Hamanee asked as the city drew nearer.

"He was with me the night that..you know...when you were captured," He explained.

"I see," Hamanee said as they entered the city and merged into heavy traffic of similar vehicles.

"Would you like to stay for dinner," Yuka asked as Hamanee stopped

the vehicle in front of a mansion looking estate.

"Considering I don't know anyone else on this planet," Jones said getting out and retrieving his bag. "Yes I would love to stay for dinner."

"Excellent," Yuka said as she got out as well along with Hamanee the couple walking side by side to the door. Jones followed at a respectful distance behind them and when they stopped to open the door Jones stood back a few feet. Once they got it open and stepped in Jones waited a few seconds and took a deep breath finishing the last of his cigarette before he pocketed the butt unsure of what to do with it. Exhaling the cloud of smoke he walked in with his shoulders back and his head held high. His boots left the well manicured lawn outside and came in contact with a highly polished stone floor. The entrance was massive the ceiling going well above his head the shiny floor going all the way to a set of stairs directly in front of him with two other chambers to his right and left. Jones looked down to his worn and dinged up combat boots and could see they were already scratching the pristine floor. He quickly looked around to see if anyone saw this. His fear became real as he saw an Elite walking towards him. Jones carefully turned to face the approaching Elite, as not to scuff up the floor anymore and waited for the tongue lashing. Instead he reached a hand out and grabbed Jones's bag.

"I will take your belongings human," The Elite said in his native tongue as he lifted the bag up with ease.

"Thank you," Jones replied in Sangheili surprising the Elite as he walked off with Jones's duffel bag. Jones turned and saw both Huka and Yuka Hamanee embracing a third Elite wearing green armor a color unseen by him. Slowly Jones walked over still staying a respectful distance away. Huka was the first to leave the embrace and turn to Jones.

"Jones I would like you to meet my son," Huka said pulling the unnamed Elite by the shoulders closer to Jones. "Romle Hamanee."

"Nice to meet you," Jones said bowing bring a fist to his shoulder.

"Indeed," Romle said not bowing until his father slapped him on back. As Jones stood back up he got the feeling that Romle didn't like him very much.

"How old are you?" Jones asked trying to change the subject.

"10," Romle said curtly crossing his arms.

"Years?" Jones asked amazed. "You look just like an adult."

"Your powers of observation are astonishing," Romle said dryly.

"Know your place boy," Huka said a little anger entering his voice. "Our species matures much faster than yours. At eight they began their training in fact there is really no advantage for your species to mature so slowly when we live just as long or longer in most

cases."

"Huh," Was all Jones could think of to say.

"I will show you to your room," Yuka said stepping in between the three and taking Jones from the awkward situation that was quickly developing. She took Jones to a large bedroom with a massive bed and beautifully carpeted floor his duffel bag already waiting inside. He looked down and saw that his boots were leaving specs of dirt and grass on the immaculate carpet.

"I will come and retrieve you when the meal is ready," Yuka said leaving and shutting the door. Jones didn't really know what to do or how long it would take and since he hadn't slept since he was on the Silent Dawn he decided he could go for a nap. Removing the flower necklace followed by his uniform jacket and placing them over the back of a chair he walked over to the bed and sat down to remove his boots. That complete he laid down on top of the covers, a habit from the core doing so he had to spend less time on making it in the morning, and almost immediately went to sleep. What only felt like a moment later to him a loud knock woke him from his slumber.

"Jones are you there?" Yuka's sweet voice asked floating through the door.

"Yeah I'm here," Jones said groggily as he sat up swinging his legs over the bed and placing his feet into his boots. "I'll be there in just a second." He finished lacing his boots and looked out the window as he stood up to smooth out the bed sheets, also a habit from spending most of his adult life in the core. He had seen that the sun had gone down and it was dark outside, looking at his watch he saw he had been asleep for nearly five hours. After putting on and buttoning up his uniform jacket he opened the door and saw Yuka wearing an elegant dress looking stunning.

"Are you ready?" She asked.

"I guess I am," Jones said as he looked his uniform over. This was one of his nicer ones not having worn it in combat just on the Silent Dawn but it was still worm and had faded slightly. Feeling a little embarrassed about his state of dress he followed Yuka to a grand dining hall. Already setting at the large table were Romle and Huka Hamanee wearing their highly polished sliver armor Huka's trimmed in gold Romle in green making Jones feel horribly underdressed now. Also seating at the table was another female Elite, Jones had never seen before, also wearing a dress looking just as beautiful if not more so then Yuka.

"May we eat now father?" Romle asked eyeing Jones. Huka shoot his son a disapproving glance but didn't address him.

"Jones please take a seat," Huka said. Jones took the open seat across from Romle while Yuka sat next to her husband. After everyone was seating down a feast was laid out before them with only a few dishes Jones recognized. After the food had been laid out Jones reached for his plate and loaded it with the food he knew he liked. He then ducked his head and started shoving spoonfuls of it into his mouth as quickly as he could something also learned from the UNSCMC. When his plate was clean shortly afterwards he looked up to see that the Elites had just started eating in fact Yuka was still preparing

her plate.

"Hungry human?" Romle asked taking a small spoonful of food and placed it in his mouth chewing it carefully. Jones felt his face flush he had a lot of habits that were going to be hard to break.

"Well not anymore," Jones said trying to make a joke. He sat back and interlaced his fingers as he pressed his thumbs together and pulled them apart rapidly as everyone else finished eating.

"Have you meet Aima Kalmare?" Yuka asked referring to the other female.

"No," Jones said turning towards her. "Nice to meet you ma'am."

"Is this the one you speak so highly of?" She asked Yuka.

"Indeed he is," Yuka said winking at Jones who immediately flushed.

"He's a lot more handsome then the pictures you sent me," Kalmare said. Jones coughed spitting some of his drink back into his glass before placing it back on the table. He shifted his legs and blood started to flow to the right places.

"So Jones," Huka said senescing his friend's discomfort. "What are your plans?"

"Well," Jones began giving the subject some real thought. "I saw what I thought was a village maybe I could go live there."

"You would become a farmer?" Romle asked clearly disgusted with the idea.

"If it earns me my keep sure," Jones said with a shrug.

"A warrior of your states should stay in the city living in comfort," Huka said more disappointed with Jones's idea then disgusted. "Not toiling in the hot sun for hours on end."

"I think it would be best for everyone if I was in a secluded area," Jones explained. "Plus I don't mind a honest days labor. If it will allow me to live there."

"Are you sure I couldn't convince you to stay here?" Huka asked. "I would be pleased to support you financially leaving you free to do whatever it is you desire."

"No," Jones said simply. "I wouldn't feel right plus I would go insane not having anything to do all day."

"Very well," Huka said with a sigh. "If this is truly your wish then I shall honor it. You have spared my life and saved it several time including from the parasite. I have the deed to a rather large amount of undeveloped land about two hours outside the city limits. I had planned to give to farmers who would work the land giving me a present of their profits."

"Alright," Jones said not really following.

"Instead I give it to you," Huka explained. "Further more I will give you the funds to build a home and develop the land so it may be farmed if that is truly your wish."

"I don't know what to say," Jones admitted as he stared at his former enemy turned friend.

"Say nothing my friend," Huka said raising a hand. "It is the least you have earned."

"I think it is time for all of us to retire," Yuka said getting to her feet. "Jones I will show you to your room."

"Thank you," Jones said getting to his feet as well. "I think I would get lost."

"And I shall accompany them," Kalmare said. Jones followed the two back to his room put before he could go inside Kalmare went in first.

"Uh hey that's my room," Jones called after her then turning to Yuka. "That is my room isn't."

"Indeed it is," Yuka said gently pushing Jones through the door and into the room following right behind him. He looked around but couldn't see Kalmare anywhere.

"Where'd she go?" He asked Yuka.

"Is is preparing in the bathroom," Yuka explained shutting the door.

"For what?" Jones asked.

"You are her first mate so she is readying herself for you," Yuka explained.

"What?" Jones almost shouted his mouth drying up a little as his heart beat increased. "I just meet her."

"Ah but she knows all about you Jones," Yuka explained seating on the edge of the bed crossing her legs.

"How? When?" Jones stammered.

"I told her about you," Yuka explained. "She has fallen in love with you since my first story of you several years ago back when my husband was captured. I told you I would find you the prefect mate."

"Then why are you here?" Jones asked his heart pounding and face flushing.

"It is not unheard of for a more experienced female to help and guild the less experienced one," Yuka explained placing her arms behind her and leaning back. Jones was about to ask what she meant when the sound of a door opening caused his head to snap around. Silhouetted in the doorway was Kalmare completely nude looking at the floor grabbing her left arm with her right. She was a little shorter then

Yuka but still taller than Jones and was just as curvaceous as Yuka with flawless skin.

"Don't be shy," Yuka said beckoning. "Come here." She walked over and stood in front of the two a smiling Yuka and unbelieving Jones. "Go ahead and undress Jones." Jones hesitated for just a second and Yuka leaned over to whisper in his ear. "If you don't do this she will think she does not please you and that is a great insult." Gulping hard Jones managed to wet his mouth a little as he slowly got undressed until he was nude as well. Kalmare looked up and looked Jones over who felt himself blush again.

"Sorry about the scars," Jones said trying to make a joke as he rubbed the back of his head. Kalmare giggled a little at the joke.

"Now the first thing you will notice is that the human sex organ remains outside of his body at all times unlike our males," Yuka explained to Kalmare. "To prepare for the mating process it becomes erect from pleasurable stimulant. Such as this." Yuka began to gently stroke his half hard penis it becoming full erect almost immediately.

"I see," Kalmare said.

"You try," Yuka said letting go to allow Kalmare a chance. Kalmare walked up to Jones and knelt grabbing his member but to hard causing Jones to draw in a sharp breath of pain. Kalmare let go and backed away some startled.

"You have to be gentle," Yuka explained. Nodding Kalmare tried again this time gently stoking Jones this time. Jones let out a sigh of pleasure this time. "Very good." Yuka said.

"Would it be alright to use my mouth?" She asked Yuka.

"I have never tried myself," Yuka admitted. "Do you humans do that?" She asked Jones who was watching Kalmare in a trance.

"Uh what," Jones said. "Yeah sure." Kalmare moved her hand farther down his member as the tip of it entered her mouth. Careful to keep her many teeth from touching the sensitive organ she took all of it into her mouth running her tongue along its length. She then moved back and just before his member left her mouth she took it all in again. Jones placed a hand on the back of her head helping her with the motion.

"That is enough," Yuka said. Kalmare stopped a trail of saliva connecting the tip of his penis to her mouth, she stood up wiping her mouth. "Alright lay on the bed Kalmare." She did as instructed laying on her back arms to her sides. "Alright Jones your turn but be gentle." Nodding Jones moved to the bed and positioned himself so the tip of his member was resting against Kalmare's womanhood. He started to ease himself in but came against resistance that needed a little extra effort to get past. However once he got past it he continued his full length entering her all at once accidentally. Kalmare let out a hiss of pain causing Jones to withdraw himself quickly the tip resting against her again.

"I'm sorry," Jones said.

"Here let me," Kalmare said softly placing a hand on the side of his face. She then raised her hips up letting only some of Jones enter her. She then started to slowly circle her hips which felt amazing to Jones. She raised her hips even more allowing more of Jones into her as she continued to circle her hips. She then lowered them back to the bed Jones moving his hips in so he stayed inside of her.

"You may proceed," Kalmare sighed. Jones started to thrust slowly and shallowly as she started to moan in pleasure. As she started to loosen he began to thrust fully and faster placing his hands under her hips and lifted them up so he could get a better angle.

"Keep doing that," Kalmare moaned. Jones went even farther by grabbing one of her legs and placed it over her shoulder as she turned slightly to the side. "That is even better." She gasped. "I think...I think...I think I'm almost there." Jones sped up even more as he felt her body began to tremble. He let her leg fall allowing her to rest her back on the bed as he leaned forward to kiss her. She wrapped her arms around his back her nails digging into his skin as her orgasm rippled through her.

"YES! YES! THAT'S IT!" She shouted startling Jones but only a little. He felt himself go after that letting out a grunt himself. He then lay on top of her as they shared a kiss. He then withdrew himself as he moved over to lay on his own back. Kalmare snuggled up to him resting her head on his bare chest as he wrapped an arm around her.

"I love you," She whispered into his ear.

"As I do you," Jones said knowing full well he was just telling her what she wanted to hear, but she was beautiful. He didn't know if it was the long period he spent at war but he could see himself growing old with her. He really did love Yuka but she was already married and he wouldn't want to ruin that no matter what. He looked around but couldn't see her anyway thinking she must have left before they had finished. He looked back over at Kalmare who had fallen asleep deciding that wasn't such a bad idea he closed his eyes as well.

21. The sins of the father

I know that the events between the third and fourth halo games were really only four years apart but in order to make this work I had to make it a minimum of eight years. Hope you enjoy it anyway.

Eight years after Jones arrives on the Sangheili planet.

"Sir we can't hold this line over!" Jones shouted into the radio's handset.

"Sergeant you are going to have to hold your position," The voice on the other end said. "Reinforcements are inbound now but you have to hold until they get there."

"Sir be advised we are outnumbered, out gunned and running out of ammunition over!" Jones explained.

"Understood sergeant but there is nothing we can do, you are on your own till the reinforcements arrive," The voice explained. "Out."

"No goddamn it not again!" Jones shouted into the handset. "We are taking heavy casualties we need air support, fire support, fucking something!" After several seconds of silence. "I know you can fucking hear me say something!...Fine fuck you to!" Jones threw the handset to the ground and picked up his assault rifle before running back to the line. Diving behind a cluster of sandbags that were being pelted by plasma fire Jones shoulder his rifle and fired at the incoming Covenant forces.

With a gasp Jones awoke staring at the dark ceiling covered in a cold sweat. Jones slowly sat up and looked to his right to make sure he hadn't woken Aima Kalmare now Aima Jones. Jones had been correct and he had fallen in love very quickly with Aima after he accepted the fact that it would never work with Yuka. They had been married a few months after they meet the ceremony was a small affair as Aima father was a sword bearer Sangheili and her mother raised her alone. Then Jones hadn't known anyone leaving the only ones to show up was Aima's mother, the Hamane family and Jones's file members: Fulsamee, Rolamnee, Mortumee and Putumee._ Although he still had some feelings for Yuka that only made him hate himself for even thinking of her instead of his wife. He picked up his watch from the night stand and looked at the time. The days on the planet were longer but that was the beauty of his watch it could be changed to match a planet's day. After humans left Earth making watches that only used 24 hour days was stupid since most colonized planets weren't on 24 hour days.

It was close enough to the time he normal woke up so he carefully got out of the bed as not to wake Aima. He walked to his bathroom and relived himself before looking himself in the mirror. Though not in the military anymore he still cut his hair close to his skull but now sported a neatly trimmed goatee. He shaved his cheeks and under his chin to maintain the clean cut look before he brushed his teeth using his tooth brush he was issued form the UNSCMC and the dental hygiene paste the Sangheilis used. It tasted horrible and didn't really whiten his teeth but he hadn't had a problem with his teeth so far.

That taken care of he walked out and into the bedroom and crept to his closet and opened the door. Finding cloths on this planet that fit him was tricky so what he did was use their cloths as patches and alterations to his uniforms. He pulled out his work uniform that Aima had washed and neatly folded. This pair of pants was more patches then original material, after pulling them on he tucked in one of his undershirts that had faded from olive drab to a light brown. He then put on his uniform jacket that had just as many patches and he had cut the selves back so they stopped just before his elbows. Pulling on his faded and dust stained patrol cap before he pulled out his last item his now even more worn and falling apart combat boots. Finding foot wear was even harder in fact he had been completely unsuccessful not even finding something that he could alliterate. So his boots were held together with duct tape and glue.

Now fully dressed he slowly walked down the stairs and to the kitchen and ate a quick breakfast of cold leftovers from last night's dinner. He was about to step outside when he saw the light on the laptop capable of across space commutation that Captain McKnight had sent

him was blinking. With a puzzled look across his face he walked over to it and sat in the chair in front of the computer. He enter his password and the screen came to life the face of Captain McKnight filling the screen.

"Gunnery Sergeant Allen Jones how the hell are you?" He asked smiling.

"Captain McKnight," Jones said also smiling. "I am doing fine how are you?" The smile on McKnight's face slowly faded as he flicked his eyes left and right.

"I'm sorry son I didn't understand a word you just said," McKnight explained. Jones cursed inside his head. It had been so long since he had spoken English that he forgot it wasn't his default language anymore.

"Sorry sir," Jones said switching effortlessly to English. "I'm fine how have you been Captain?"

"That's admiral now," McKnight corrected Jones.

"A full admiral in only eight years impressive," Jones said.

"I didn't wake you did I?" Admiral McKnight asked.

"I was already awake sir but my family is still sleeping however," Jones explained. "So how are things in the UNSC?"

"Well we found the Forward onto Dawn to include the Spartan alive and his AI roughly four years ago," McKnight explained.

"Four years ago what have you had the poor bastard doing?" Jones asked truly surprised they had found the legendary Spartan yet alone alive.

"Medical and mental exams mostly," McKnight explained. "Of course we also have done stress and stability tests on the AI as well."

"And?" Jones coaxed.

"The Spartan pasted with fly colors the AI on the other hand," McKnight said clearly having given a lot of thought to the subject. "Passed just inside the boarder lines of the acceptable tolerances."

"I see anything else?" Jones asked.

"Look I didn't contact you to discuss the Spartan or his AI," McKnight said. "After eight years of a restless peace there has been rumors of Covenant sympathizers growing in number."

"That has been the rumor since the end of the war sir," Jones said.

"I know but things are different this time," McKnight explained. "We have real evidence this time that this so called 'Storm Covenant' is strong in number and has hostile intent." McKnight hesitated at the next part and looked truly disheartened. "The reserves are being called up both active...and inactive." Jones sat back heavily into

his chair his mouth agape. "I wish these bastards could have just wanted two more years. I really do."

"I'm sorry sir I can't do it," Jones said firmly the color gone from his face. "Things are different now. These Sangheili uh Elites would not go against our pact. Plus I have a wife now and...and I have a son sir. I can't leave them not now." McKnight's eyes widen when he found out he had a son and then a smile slow spread across his face.

"I guessed as much," McKnight said. "That's well I'm sorry to inform you Gunnery Sergeant Allen Jones that you have failed your yearly mental exam and are unfit for active duty. The reason for your failure is PTSD caused from years of combat during several conflicts. This being the case you have been removed from the inactive reserves list and placed on retirement states with full benefits entitled to you from the UNSCMC."

"Sir I don't know what to say," Jones said relief flooding through his body. "But sir I haven't taken a mental exam since I left the core."

"I know," McKnight said with a smile and the look that every member in the military comes to know as the 'what they don't know won't hurt them' look. "Now go live your life and that's an order."

"Will do sir," Jones said turning off the laptop and ending the conversation. He slowly got to his feet a little shaky for have thought he was going to have to go to war again. He stepped outside and took a deep breath of the fresh air that greeted him. The sun was just starting to come up turning the sky a light purple as Jones walked to the shed behind his house. Hamanee had held true to his word and given the funds to build his house and tools to work the land and now after eight of this planet's seasons the present of his profits had finally paid his friend back. Of course Hamanee didn't want Jones to but he had insisted and reluctantly Hamanee had accepted payment. So now this season's harvest, after expenses and the taxes he had to pay, it was all profit.

"Maybe I can afford the harvester I have needed for eight years," Jones said to himself as he opened the shed. He walked inside and was surround by different hanging tools that he had cut down or other wised modified so he could use them as they hadn't been built with a human in mind. After pulling the ones he needed for that day's work he loaded them into the back of the hovering vehicle that only had two seats in the front and a large flat cargo area in the back, with a rear and front hitch, the Sangheili version of a pickup truck and tractor rolled into one. Taking his place behind the wheel he started it up and drove it slowly out of the shed stopped so he could hook up the grain trailer with the automatic loader. Jumping back into the driver's seat he opened up the throttle and drove towards his furthest field, he liked to start out and work his way towards his house.

15 minutes later he reached the field full of a mature crop of what he found out was called irukan a grain that was the equivalent of wheat and was just an important staple. He also found out that is was originally farmed by Jackals and was later taken back to this planet to be farmed by Sangheili after they had taken a liking to it. The sun had just peeked over the horizon sending its first rays of golden

light across the sky as he eased to a stop next to the field and got out. Taking another deep breath of the still cool dawn air he pulled on his gloves and grabbed his first tool. It looked like the long handle of a scythe but without the blade. As he pulled it from the bed he activated it a curved energy blade hummed to life at the end looking just like the blade of a scythe. The blade was seemlier in ideal of the energy sword but not as intense so it would cut through the crops but not start fire to the entire field.

Starting at one end of the field Jones swung the tool in a wide arch slicing through the bottom of the steams causing them to fall in front of him. He started to walk forward swing the scythe in front of him as he did so casing more of the crop to fall to the ground. When he reached the end of the field he turned around and started back the other way widening the area of cut crop. He kept this as the sun rose higher into the sky causing sweat to break out first on his forehead then his whole body only stopping to take a drink from his canteen. He was just over half way through the field and had almost completed a pass when he set the scythe down and leaned heavily on it as he drank the last of his canteen. Jones looked at his watch then and saw it was close enough to midday to warrant a lunch break. Deactivating the scythe he laid it on the ground before walking back towards the truck removing his cap and wiping his face with a piece of cloth. Seating on the back edge of the truck bed he pulled up his lunch box and opened it. He ate more leftovers but this time warmed by the sun. Over the years he had managed to slow his eating down some but he still ate quickly and finished his lunch in under 10 minutes.

Brushing off the front of his pants Jones jumped down and walked over to where he had dropped the scythe and went back to work. It took him a few more hours but he finished cutting the field. He walked back to the truck dragging the scythe in his left hand and wiping his face with a cloth in his right. He threw the scythe in the back of the bed before he walked to the trailer and unfolded the automatic loader. Getting behind the wheel of the truck he started it up and slowly drove up and down the field the loading picking up cut crop and stowing it in the trailer. The sun was just starting to go down as the last of the cut irukan was pulled into the trailer. Jones eased the vehicle to a stop and got out to refold the loader before heading back towards his house and his wife cooking dinner for him.

Instead of pulling the vehicle into the shed and going immediately inside, like he wanted he drove it behind the shed to the milling machine and backed the trailer up to the loader. Shutting the engine off yet again he got out and pulled out the pitch fork like tool from the truck bed and walked to the trailer. He started shoving mounds of irukan into the hopper when he heard a voice behind him.

"Father!" The already deep voice said. Jones turned around wiping the slowly drying sweat from his face to see his son Vilan Kalmare Jones. It seemed Yuka was wrong when he said it was genetically impossible for a human and Sangheili to have offspring. He took mostly after his mother looking just like a normal Sangheili expect for his legs and feet. His legs were built like his father's so he didn't have a hunched appearance, but were just as muscular as a Sangheili's while his feet were shaped like a human's expect he didn't have individual toes. He feet were much large then Jones's leaving him unable to find any kind of foot wear forcing him to walk around bare foot. It so happened that Aima had gotten pregnant the first night they meet.

Jones had planned on marrying her but when he found out he proposed on the spot after she had woken him up after he had fainted.

Jones had been terrified when he found out not just in becoming a dad but he was afraid his child was going to be some horrible mutant that would be hunted down and killed by other Sangheilis. However he resembled a normal Sangheili except of the build of his lower body so he was mostly accepted into the culture but was different enough that everyone knew he was a half-breed. Jones raised him loving him more each day as he grew very quickly as Hamanee had explained. As he grew he wanted to hear stories of his father's battles and Jones told him the ones he had fought against the Brutes. Everything was fine until he had started school and he learned he was much different from the other young Sangheilis. He knew his father was a human a different species than his mother but he had thought that was a very common thing. He still managed to make a few friends however and they told each other their fathers' war stories but that was when little Vilan became really confused and troubled after hearing their fathers had killed humans. Vilan became so upset and was sure they were lying that he took them all on in a fight. He was doing good until one of them grabbed him from behind and held him on the ground. When he got home covered in bruises and cuts Jones had demanded what had happen and Vilan told him he had fought a bunch of liars that they had said their fathers had killed humans.

Jones had thought he was old enough then to tell him about the war between humans and the Covenant. Told him how he had meet his 'Uncle' Huka Hamanee(leaving out the part with Yuka and Jenkins) about the Elites withdrawal from the Covenant. The halo rings(what he knew of them which wasn't much) the Flood and the following conflict with the Brutes after the Flood was destroyed. After he was finished Vilan looked up at him and asked a question that completely shocked Jones.

"Do you still love me?" Little Vilan asked with tears forming in his eyes.

"Of course I do," Jones said immediately as he knelt and picked his son up embracing him. "I will always love you no matter what."

Vilan had grown a lot since that night and now as he approached his father as he loaded the hopper for the milling machine he looked just like an adult Sangheili except for the build of his lower body.

"How was school?" Jones asked scooping more irukan into the hopper.

"Very informative," Vilan said. "A pleasant last day as any I suppose."

"Why don't you go inside and wash up your mother should have dinner almost ready," Jones continuing to scoop. "She made your favorite."

"You do not require help father?" Vilan asked.

"Normally yes but today is your birthday so I think you deserve the night off from chores," Jones explained starting to see the bottom of the trailer.

"Your father is right young one," Huka said walking up the path to the house with Yuka next to him caring a box. "Go inside tonight's celebration is just for you." Vilan nodded and walked inside the house with Yuka right behind him still caring the box as Huka approached Jones watching him scoop the last of the irukan into the hopper.

"Come to help a poor and humble farmer?" Jones asked as he wiped his face.

"More like a resting warrior," Huka said crossing his arms. "I have come to celebrate your son's birthday."

"Oh I see," Jones said smiling as he walked over to the machine and started it up. A conveyor belt took scoops of irukan from the hopper to the mouth of the milling machine where it was crushed and ground leaving only the usable grain before it was stored in 50 pound sacks. Once each sack was filled and sealed Jones picked them up and stored them in a store house nearby. Once all the irukan was ground and stored Jones shut the machine down and put his truck and tools back in the shed. He completed this all while Huka just watched and the sun had almost completely disappeared from the sky.

"Still happy with your life choice Jones?" Huka asked.

"Living the dream buddy," Jones said walking inside the house with Huka in tow. After washing up and a nice dinner Vilan, Huka, Yuka, Aima and Jones were sitting in the living room giving their gifts to Vilan for he wasn't just turning eight but he would be leaving to start his combat training every Sangheili male received.

"Open ours first," His mother said meaning the gift she and Jones had pooled their money to get. Vilan opened the box as quickly as he could and once he had it open he carefully removed his prize. A brand new and shiny carbine his weapon to take with him to training.

"It's beautiful," Vilan remarked holding it up to the light. "Thank you mother thank you father."

"Now ours," Yuka said handing him her box. He opened it just as quickly soon pulled out the chest piece for his brand new custom green color armor. It was custom so it would fit his legs and green for he was a trainee.

"Thank you Uncle," Vilan said pulling out each piece and turning it over in his hands before carefully putting it back in the box. Vilan stood to take his gifts to his room when Jones spoke.

"When I was drafted," He started causing Vilan to stop and sit back down. "My father gave me two things. The first was a watch this very watch in fact." Jones took his watch off and handed to Vilan who took it and looked at it carefully. "He told it to me it was so I could use it to count how many days of training I had left and so no matter how bad things got I would at least know the time."

"Thank you father," Vilan said strapping it to his wrist as he had seen his father do. This simple watch held more history than Vilan could imagine or Jones for that matter. Some sand had been permanently ground into the back of the face when he crawled under

the razor wire in basic training as live rounds screamed over his head. A piece of Yuka's skin had gotten caught in the band from the night during the mission that changed his life. The glass that covered the face had been cracked slightly and before he had replaced it a few tiny drops of Mendez's blood, from when he was stabbed and killed, had found their way in and dried on the number 6. During Jones's fight with Hamanee the glass was cracked again and a drop of Hamanee's sweat had gotten in and dried on the 8. Every major life changing event that took place in Jones's life, there was a piece of it in or on his watch that he gave to his son.

"The second thing that he gave me was something that has been handed down in my family for a very, very, very long time," Jones explained pulling out his combat knife still in its sheath. "Long before humans left Earth we had enough trouble fighting and killing each other. One of my ancestors was a marine during what is now called World War 2, he was issued this knife. Ever since then there has been a Jones fighting in every war either by choice or because he was forced to, always with him was this knife. This was the knife I used in combat as well, I took it with me on every mission expect for the one when I was captured. I had mixed it up with the knife I was issued, good thing to for they took it from me before I was placed in my cell. This knife is almost 600 years old yet it's still sharp and just as deadly because the bearer of this knife has always taken good care of it. Now I pass it on to you like my father to me and his father to him and so on and so forth."

Jones handed it to Vilan handle first still inside its sheath who took it even more carefully then he had the watch.

"I know it's not a very effective weapon in these times," Jones explained. "I still want you to have it, what you do with it is your choice." Vilan looked at the weapon that his father had given him and couldn't find the words to express his joy and the honor he felt. For his father had felt him worthy enough to wield a weapon with such a rich history.

"Farther," Vilan started feeling a tear starting to form in one eye. "I will carry it with me where ever I go. I will take care of it so I may pass it onto my own son."

"Glad to hear it," Jones said. "Happy birthday son." Vilan removed the knife from its sheath and looked at the weathered but strong steel blade and worn but still functional handle. He looked at it as someone might looked a piece of treasure they just found. Vilan slipped the knife back into the sheath before taking all of his gifts to his room. Yuka and Aima left to talk leaving Huka Hamanee and Allen Jones alone. Jones grabbed a pair of drinks from the kitchen and lead them to the porch and two of the three chairs that were there. They sat in silence of a time sipping their drinks and staring into the night until Jones spoke.

"So tell me my friend what do you know of this 'Storm Covenant'?" Jones asked setting his drink down. Hamanee looked at Jones a puzzled looked on his features. "Captain, no Admiral McKnight, contacted me today telling me the UNSC considers them enough of a threat to call up the reserves including the inactive."

"You don't have to?" Hamanee asked leaving forward his drink forgotten.

"No the wily devil got me out of it with full benefits," Jones explained. "I guess my question is: are the Sangheili part of this new Covenant?" Hamanee let out a heavy sigh before answering.

"Unfortunately yes," Hamanee said bluntly. "Most of them didn't fight alongside humans during the brief war with the Jiralhanae so they have no respect for your species and still consider it weak. Hell most of them didn't fight the parasite so they never knew how big of a threat to our two species they were."

"Do they, this Strom Covenant, have any influence on this planet?" Jones asked just as bluntly. "Do I have reason to fear for my family's safety?" The field marshal looked at Jones for a long moment before sighing again.

"There has been reports and whispers that Covenant sympathizers and supporters are indeed on this planet," Hamanee explained. "I am part of a force that it tasked with stomping these traitors out."

"So everything is under control?" Jones asked raising an eyebrow.

"What I going to tell you is never to be repeated to anyone," Hamanee said locking eyes with his friend. "The only reason I am telling you is because of everything we have been through. There are whispers that some superior officers and their troops in our own combat forces support these traitorous cowards, secretly giving them aid in the form of weapons and warriors."

"My question still stand," Jones said firmly.

"No," Hamanee said. "There is no reason to concern yourself." Jones trusted his friend and sat back in his chair and finished his drink. The rest of the night was spent talking of more pleasant topics until both Yuka and Huka left and Jones took a shower before going to bed with Aima next to him and Vilan in his room. Jones had a little trouble falling asleep not just because of this new Storm Covenant but because his son would be leaving for training to be trained by a Sangheili that might sympathize with them putting him in danger. However sleep did come but long after Aima had drifted to sleep. The next day was Jones's day off and he slept in only to be woken up by the sun shining through the window.

He sat up and stretched his arms accidentally nudging Aima who mumbled something but turned over and continued to sleep. Jones carefully brought his arms back in as not to disturbed her again before getting out of bed and walked to the closet. He opened it and pulled out his best uniform having the feeling that it was going to be a nice easy day. He had just finished lacing up his boots when a pounding on the front door startled him.

"The hell?" Jones muttered as he rushed to answer his door before his family was woken up. "Yeah I coming!" Jones shouted as he walked down the stairs skipping every other one as the pounding continued. Jones opened the door to see Hamanee standing there in full golden armor clutching a plasma rifle his face grim. "Jesus what is it?" Jones demanded as Hamanee pushed past Jones and into his house.

"It seems I was wrong," Hamanee said marching up the stairs. "Those murderous cowards had sympathizers in the high council."

"Who?" Jones demanded following him up the stairs.

"This Storm Covenant," Hamanee said stopping at the top and rubbing the back of his head. "The same ones we discussed last night. Today I know the meaning of irony."

"My god," Jones said feeling ice enter his veins.

"That is not the worst of it," Hamanee said walking so he was just outside of Vilan's room. "I greatly underestimated their influence in our army and the legions that didn't already support them was swayed by the traitorous council members. The other members and troops they couldn't sway they sought to wipe out. I don't know how long they planned this but they started it early this morning during a council meeting. All the loyal ones are dead as are most of the loyal companies of troops killed in their bunks. Fighting rages but we are out numbered as the ones not in active service but support the Covenant have taken up arms against us as well. Those that openly don't support them are killed keeping the rest of the undecided non-warriors out of this battle."

"It's a revolution," Jones muttered disbelieving his own words.

"Indeed," Hamanee said somberly. "One I don't think we can win."

"What do we do," Jones demanded frantically.

"Gather your family and belongings arm yourself we and what loyal troops I have left are leaving this planet," Hamanee ordered handing Jones an Elite's combat harness filled with carbine power cells. Taking the harness and putting it on he opened Vilan's door and rushed in.

"Father what is it," Vilan asked sitting bolt upright in his bed from the noise Jones had made. He didn't answer his son but instead jogged over and snatched up his carbine he had gotten as a gift the night before and shoved a power cell into the receiver.

"Get dressed and hurry," Jones ordered his voice clam but clearly under strain. Vilan's eyes widen as he jumped out of his bed and went for the box that contained his armor. "There is no time of that shit! It doesn't have a shield anyway pack a change of clothes and meet down stairs." Without protest Vilan hurried to change and throw clothes into a bag as Jones left to grab his wife.

"What is going on?" She asked having already gotten dressed.

"Pack some extra clothes we are leaving," Jones said as he rushed to a table and pulled open a drawer and pulled out a rather thick file.

"Is everything alright?" Aima asked fear entering her voice.

"No," Jones said walking over to her. "I don't have time to explain here take this and whatever you do don't lose it." Jones handed her

the file before walking down the stairs passing Hamanee who followed him. "Plan?" Jones asked as he descended the stairs as Hamanee walked next to him.

"There is a Phantom only a few miles from here," Hamanee explained as they reached the bottom where Vilan already waited. "Guarded by troops loyal to me. We are going to use it to get off this planet, after that I don't know."

"We head for UNSC controlled space," Jones said more as an order than a suggestion. "I am still a citizen and I'll make sure you and your troops get asylum as refugees."

"Alright," Hamanee agreed as Aima came down the stairs clutching a bag and the file Jones had given her. "Let's go." Hamanee opened the door and lead them to a vehicle, that already had a driver, in-between two Specters fully crewed. Jones and his family jumped into the unarmed transport vehicle with Hamanee and the drive and all three vehicle, staying in formation drove away from his home. They hadn't gotten very far when the gunner of the lead Specter radioed Hamanee.

"Excellently we have a rebel barricade up ahead," He said grimly.
"It's a road block."

"What?" Hamanee demanded as he leaned over the edge of his vehicle so he could see. "They were not there when we arrived. How did they know we were here?"

"They didn't," Jones said just as grimly. "They were waiting for me. I bet there is a squad heading to my house right now they are there to make sure I don't escape."

"Why?" Hamanee asked.

"Think about it," Jones said. "I am the only human on this planet prefect to make an example of in a public execution." This explanation got horrified looks from both Vilan and Aima.

"I fear you are right," Hamanee said keying his radio. "Smash through, don't stop."

"As you wish excellently," The gunner said just before he opened up sending blue fire towards the blockade. The two Elites in the side jump seats opened up as well one with a carbine the other a needler. The other Specter pulled out from behind the transport and pulled up so it was next to the lead Specter its occupants also firing towards the rebels. The driver of the transport eased off the throttle giving some room to the two combat vehicles as they lead the charge. Return fire from the rebels flew harmless pass the small convoy the only time rounds even hit the vehicles was when the two Specters smashed through the sloppily made obstacle leaving the rebels to fire point blank. Then convoy was safely on the other side out of the rebel's range of fire and the second Specter fell back behind the transport. Jones looked out the back window and could see smoke rising from the detraction of his house and knew they were burning it to the ground probably along with his crops he worked so hard to grow.

"Cocksuckers," Jones muttered under his breath. "Hamanee where is

your wife and son?"

"I had to leave my home when this started," Hamanee explained. "I didn't know it was going to get like this so I sent a file to pick them up and take them to the Phantom. They should be there already."

"Excellently," The rear Specter gunner radioed this time. "The rebels pursue us." He turned and fired behind them at two Ghosts and three un-armed vehicles loaded with Elites armed with different weapons. The lead Specter fell back so his gunner could fire as well but the Elites in the jump seats just couldn't get an angle. The pursuing forces didn't have that problem and soon a hail storm of rounds flew at the two out gunned Specters.

"They're going to overtake us," Jones said looking out the back. Hamanee grunted in agreement.

"Increase speed," He said talking to the driver. The vehicle jerked forward pulling away from the Specter who in turn increased their speed as well. They started to pull away from the overloaded transports but the Ghosts' pilots hit their boosts and quickly caught up to the convoy hosing the Specters with plasma fire. One of the Elites in the left jump seat in the Specters that used to be in the front took a few detract hits enough to drop his shields, the next pair of shots blew his head off and a hole through his chest. He slumped forward in his seat the only thing keeping him in it was his harness. The gunner of the other took enough hits to drop his shields as well, he ducked down to give them a moment to recharge causing a slack in outgoing fire. Meanwhile both Specters' armor was slowly being deflected and a few of the blue bolts had hit the lightly armored transport they tried to protect.

"We can't out run them," Jones said his voice toneless as he gripped his carbine tighter. Then the Specter who had already lost a man took a hit in the weakest bit of armor it had left the bolt punching its way into the engine causing it to explode knocking the gunner off the back. Without it the vehicle dropped to ground and skidded in the dirt turning so the side with the dead Elite in the jump seat was facing the oncoming Ghosts. The gunner who was on his hands and knees trying to get to his feet looked up just in time to watch the Ghost smash into his face with a wet smack, knocking his forward five feet where he landed in a twisted heap of bones and blood. The same Ghost barreled for the down Specter plasma splashing across its husk as the driver and passenger took cover on the other side. The other Ghost changed direction and went to aid his comrade when the other Specter, momentary forgotten by the two rebels, came up behind them and poured fire onto their unprotected backs.

Both pilots turned to face their attacker and as their shields were both depleted they hit their boosts at the same time before turning around. When they did turn around they saw that the disabled Specter was much closer than before and both swerved in an attempt to miss it. One did missing it by a narrow margin the other wasn't so lucky slamming into it bring his Ghost to a sudden stop. The sudden change in momentum forced the driver over the front of his vehicle and the derelict Specter. He landed on his head his neck unable to support all of his body weight snapped as he summer saluted onto his back where he lay still. The other Ghost was chased by the Specter as the gunner poured fire into his back until his torso fell from his waist

and the Ghost slowed and stopped. The other Specter pulled up next to the disabled one and came to a stop the two passengers getting out to help their injured comrades.

Hamanee had the driver stop their vehicle and was about to have him go back to help when the three transports over burdened with rebels reached the Specters and stopped a good distance away so they could dismount. The gunner of the working Specter immediately opened up while the other Elites took cover behind the two Specters as a hail storm of round flew at them.

"Excellently you need to leave this area," One of them radioed to Hamanee. "We will hold these traitors as long as we can."

"May we meet again in paradise brother," Hamanee radioed back just before the driver gunned the throttle pushing the engine to full leaving the rest of his troops behind. The last thing Jones could see was one of the rebels throw a plasma grenade driving Hamanee's troops from their cover before it exploded. The rest of the ride was in somber silence until a Phantom on a hill to came into view soon after. The driver brought the vehicle to a stop and everyone jumped out and ran towards the waiting craft. When they had reached it Hamanee keyed his radio.

"We are here get ready for takeoff," Hamanee ordered the five coming to a stop just in front of one of the side hatches. The hatches opened to reveal three black clad Elites laying in a pool of blood. Behind them stood an Elite who had his arm warped around Yuka's throat and his plasma pistol pressed to the side of her head. On either side of him stood two more Elites with their weapons already trained on the group.

"If you value your lives lower your weapons," The Elite holding Yuka hostage ordered.

"Zamanee you traitorous bastard!" Hamanee shouted at him raising his plasma rifle.

"That," Zamanee said as he started to over charge his plasma pistol as Yuka whimpered. "I would not advise." Hamanee spat on the ground in disgust before discarding his rifle to the ground. Jones tossed his carbine next to it the drive upholstered his own pistol and let it drop to his feet as well.

"How did you even know we would be here?" Hamanee demanded as the four other Elites rushed over and rounded up their weapons. They then encircled the group to keep them covered at every angle.

"I informed them," Romle said stepping out of the cockpit holding a needler.

"Why son?" Hamanee asked shocked that his own son had betrayed them.

"Because father you took the side of a filthy human and his disgusting half breed offspring," Romle said walking down the ramp. "Sucre them." One of the four Elites placed a device that made rings of light appear around their wrist binding their hands in front of them on each of their wrists. "It doesn't have to be like this father."

"Like what?" Hamanee growled.

"We just want the human, his whore wife and freak of an offspring," Romle explained. "You can join our side still father and help us achieve our rightful place in the galaxy."

"What happens to Jones?" Hamanee demanded jerking forward but a rebel held him in place.

"We will kill him in front of the whole city so they may know how truly weak and pathetic our enemy is," Romle explained walking up to Jones and grabbed what little hair he had pulled his head back and ran a claw across his throat.

"I'll go with you just as long as you don't hurt my family and Hamanee," Jones grunted in pain.

"I had not intention to hurt my own father and mother," Romle said in disgust as he let go of Jones's hair. "However your abomination will be purified, burned at the stake while your sweet wife we could find...other uses for her."

"You bastard!" Jones shouted lunging at Romle who shoved him to the ground.

"You've gone soft," Romle remarked as he got up. "The mighty Specter going soft."

"Fine I agree to help you now let your mother go," Hamanee said with shame in his eyes. Jones looked at him shocked them hung his head in the shame he felt for both of them.

"Wise choice father," Romle remarked as he motioned to Zamanee who let go of Yuka. Romle removed his father's bounds and he ran to embrace the sobbing Yuka.

"Greetings again human," Zamanee said walking up to Jones and punched him in the gut causing him to double over. "I was hoping we would meet again.

"Take him away," Romle ordered as two rebels each grabbed one of Jones arms as Zamanee walked in front and a third rebel behind Jones.

"Farther to prove your new loyalty go with them," Romle ordered. "I want you to pull the trigger yourself." Hamanee stared at his son before nodded and fell in behind the rebel behind Jones. As the group walked away that left Aima, Vilan, Yuka and the drive under the guard of Romle and one other rebel.

"Jones I hope you can forgive me," Hamanee said as they walked. Jones remained silent as he tried to hold himself up his bound hands holding his stomach. "I'm sorry Jones." Hamanee said just before he grabbed the rebel behind Jones from behind and warped his arm around his throat. He then jerked his pistol from his holster and fired an over charged bolt into the rebel holding Jones's left arm depleting his shields. He then fired quickly three more times two rounds tacking the Elite in the back the third blew a hole in the back of his head. Hamanee switched his aim to fire at the other rebel holding

Jones when the rebel he was holding drove his elbow into his side forcing him to drop the pistol and loosen his grip on his throat. The rebel then fell backwards causing Hamanee to let go of him completely and was in the process of turning around to finish the field marshal off when Hamanee wrapped his legs around his waist and forced him to his back. Hamanee then climbed on top of the rebel and started to throw punches at his face as he meekly tried to block Hamanee's powerful blows.

The other rebel had let go of Jones and was turning bring his carbine up to fire on Hamanee when Jones threw his shoulder into him. The rebel was knocked off balance and stumbled back dropping his carbine. Jones felt something one the Elite's belt brush against his still bound hands and he snatched it up and activated it. He then used both hands to plunge the energy sword through the rebel's stomach the blade coming out the Elite's back. Boiling blood flowed out of his mouth as he tried to scream. Zamanee had drawn his pistol again and was firing at Jones then. Jones turned to face him still holding the sword and the Elite skewered on the end and charged him. Zamanee's rounds hit the already dead Elite as Jones gained momentum as he drove the part of the sword witch stuck out of the rebel into Zamanee as well. The traitor let out a cry of pain as Jones let go of the sword's handle letting the two bodies connected by the sword fall to the ground.

Jones turned in time to see the rebel that had stayed behind bring his weapon up and level it at him. Before he could fire the driver was behind him and threw his bound hands over his head and pulled back using the device to choke him. Romle fumbled with his pistol on his belt as his plans were destroyed before his eyes. Vilan tackled him however and used the device on his wrists to bash in Romle's face. Hamanee got off of the dead rebel and walked over to Jones and removed his bonds. Picking up the rebel's carbine he walked up to Vilan and gently pulled him off of Romle who looked up at his father through swelling and bleeding eyes.

"Father," Romle begged raising a limp hand.

"You are no son of mine," Hamanee said shouldering the carbine and fired a round through his head. Jones ran up and retrieved his own carbine and stood next to Hamanee who was busy removing everyone's bonds. "Can you fly that craft?" Hamanee asked the driver.

"I can," The driver said rubbing his wrists.

"Get it started up everyone on board," Hamanee ordered as Vilan, Aima and Yuka boarded the craft after the driver.

"We have a problem!" Jones shouted from edge of the hill top as he looked at something. Hamanee ran over to his friend and saw what he meant. The rebels that had been chasing them, now fewer in number, were running at the bottom of the hill and would soon start up it.

"Does the craft have a weapon system," Hamanee radioed to pilot as he prepared it for takeoff.

"It does not," The driver reported.

"How long tell you can get air born?" Was Hamanee's next

question.

"A few minutes," The driver said. The two ran back towards the Phantom where both their wives and Jones's son waited.

"Let go," Vilan said.

"We have to hold the rebels off," Jones said. "Otherwise none of us are going to make it."

"I will help you father," Vilan said starting down the ramp.

"No you stay there," Jones ordered. "Once it is ready you'll take off."

"How will you leave then father?" His son asked confused.

"Do not worry young one I have stashed Banshees not far from here in case something like this happened," Hamanee explained.

"No matter what happens stay on the ship," Jones ordered as the pilot started to close the hatches. "I love you son." Jones managed to get out just before they sealed. The two friends turned around and started walking towards the edge of the hill top.

"You realize there are no Banshees?" Hamanee asked as he reloaded his carbine.

"I wouldn't know how to fly one if there were," Jones said as they reached the edge as could see the rebels as they rushed the hill.

"It is an honor to die by your side my friend," Hamanee said as he shouldered his carbine.

"I just wish we could have met under different circumstances," Jones remarked as he shouldered his own carbine. The two opened fire at the same time catching the rebels by surprise as they hadn't expected resistance as two were killed before they stopped to return fire. When they did Hamanee took several different plasma bolts to the chest until his shields were depleted. He kept firing however until he took several more to the chest and stomach along with needles but before they could explode he took a carbine round between the eyes. As his limp body fell to the ground Jones's carbine had ran out of ammo and not having the time to reload he threw a plasma grenade instead the blast killed three more rebels before a carbine round took him through the throat. Jones fell back clutching at his throat as he gargled for air. Seeing no more incoming fire the rebels started forward again and as the first one crested the hill the Phantom was already rising into the air. The Elite growled as he fired uselessly at it when a gagging sound caught his attention. At his feet lay the mighty Specter dying before his eyes. Smiling the Elite knelt down and took out his energy sword. A few seconds later he held Jones head up high for all to see.

This was the last image young Vilan saw of his beloved father as the Phantom flew away. Yuka and Aima held each other as they sobbed heavy at the loss of their husbands. As the Phantom reached the blackness of space Vilan pulled out the file Jones had given to his mother and opened it, inside were a number of documents. Allen Jones had been a

careful man having taken the time to fill out all the necessary paper work for his son and wife to become full citizens of the UNSC. There was a certified marriage certificate that made Aima a citizen right behind it was his birth certificate making him a citizen. Next were their ID complete with their photos and after that was all the paper work stating that Aima and him were the sole beneficiaries of his life insurance and all the benefits entitled to Jones from the UNSCMC along with all of the money he had saved up. Even in death his father had made sure they were taken care of. Vilan let the file fall to the deck as tears ran down his face and landed next to the file. He looked at his father's watch that was still strapped to his wrist and pulled the combat knife in its sheath from his belt. These were the only two things he had left to remember his father. Anger welled up inside of the young Sangheili and he punched the empty jump seat next to him. Then again and again in till he unleashed a fury of punches at it. When he stopped the anger was gone now replaced with despair as tears streamed faster down his face.

22. Epilogue

Three days later abroad the UNSC destroyer the **_Rolling Thunder**_**.**

The Phantom had sent out a distress call and they waited for two days floating in space until a passing UNSC patrol cutter found them and took them aboard. They were suspicious of course but after seeing the file they immediately informed the chain of command reaching all the way to Admiral McKnight who made it over there personal to hear of news from the son of Jones. With all the proper paper work Vilan and Aima were clear to live in UNSC controlled space while Yuka and the pilot were given refugee status and were permitted to live in UNSC space as well. Now McKnight was listening to Vilan recount his father's death inside of McKnight's office.

"That's one hell of a story," McKnight remarked. "I truly am sorry for the loss of your father son."

"Now what?" The young Sangheili asked.

"Your father didn't really spend any off his money the UNSCMC had started back paying him and with the 500,000 you got from his life insurance you and your mother are pretty much set for life," McKnight explained. "We will just have to find you a place to get you settled probably far enough away from any main population centers so they don't cause you problems."

"Are you at war with the people who murdered my father?" Vilan asked.

"The Storm Covenant?" McKnight asked as Vilan nodded. "We will be very shortly."

"Then I want to be a marine like my father," Vilan said looking McKnight in the eyes. "I want to join this UNSCMC."

"Out of the question," McKnight said with a wave of his hand.

"Why not?" Vilan demanded slamming his fists on his desk. "I am a citizen of the UNSC am I not?"

"You are," McKnight explained a little taken back. "But according to your birth certificate you are only eight years old."

"But I look like an adult Sangheili in your eyes," Vilan explained. "Plus this is the age where we start our combat training in my culture." McKnight seemed to consider this. "Please."

"Alright," McKnight said reluctantly.

"Thank you," Vilan said. "I won't fail you."

"Hang on," McKnight said. "It will take some time. I first have to forge your birth certificate to make you at least 18 then. Can you read English as well as speak it?"

"Yes my father taught me both forms of your language," Vilan explained.

"Ok I will also give you a fake score on your armed forces exam," McKnight said rubbing his chin. "It will be just a little above passing so it doesn't draw suspicion you'll be stuck with infantry though."

"That will be fine," Vilan said crossing his arms. "As long as I get to kill them."

"Trust me you will," McKnight said. "I'll also have to set up a bank account so you can get paid. Probably a month, at least, will be the soonest you'll leave for training. In the meantime I'll find a place for you and your mother to settle."

"Thank you," Vilan said getting to his feet. "My father was right you are a good man." With that he left the office leaving McKnight wondering if he had done the right thing.

Well it appears that Jones's story is over and I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I did writing it. His story may be over but his son's is just beginning and I am planning and hoping to have the first chapter of the next story, **_*The sins of his father **_*up next weekend. So if you liked this story please be on the look out of that one. I would like to thank you all for taking the time to read my humble story and doubly grateful if you submitted a review good or bad. If you have any questions regarding this story or the upcoming one please feel free to message me.

End
file.